

As Children of Ireland

Original Stories for Ages Eight to Twelve



Composed by a nuptial hermit
of the mystical isle of Éire

Richard Mc Sweeney

AS CHILDREN OF IRELAND

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Risteárd Mac Suibhne

AS CHILDREN OF IRELAND
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ISBN: 978-1-365-44468-5

Publisher: Lulu.com on behalf of Richard Mc Sweeney

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Front cover image and design by Richard Mc Sweeney

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Author

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The
Sacred Vessel
Fills n' Brims Over Continually

~::~~“As children of Ireland, when great stories come their way,~::~~
:~they welcome them warmly as they do the night and day;~:
~welcome them they do as their inherited opportunity~
to participate in the sublime storytelling traditions of
their love to thought into word bring ancestors.
Let me here say on this fine first September day,
in this the sixteenth year into the 21st century,
that to be a child of Ireland is in some
way to be a progeny of such stories
oh come hither come thither
they be what may.”

Richard of Éire

STORY

1

FROM OUTSIDE A DREAM

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about a Man who was Awakened in the Middle of the Night by a Strange Sound.

It was about half three or quarter to four in the night; a wet winter's night. Everyone was asleep in the village, except for the odd tomcat or two that were always roaming around at that unearthly hour.

He was sleeping away contentedly, so he was, next to his wife, and he was dreaming of a summer's day.

At some point during the dream he heard a sound that wasn't of the dream, but as it were, was coming from outside the dream.

He woke up, and he didn't know where he was for a moment.

But then he could hear his wife breathing beside him.

As he was lying there looking up at the ceiling and over at the curtains with a little bit of streetlight coming in above them, he again heard the sound.

He looked around but couldn't see anything.

It was an unusual sound.

What did it sound like, Teacher?

It sounded like an oversized wellington boot, Craig flapping against your shin as you are trying to walk through tall wet grass.

As he lay there, he again heard it.

Not wanting to wake his wife, for she needed her sleep, he very slowly and quietly eased himself out of the

bed, and went out into the hallway.

He didn't turn on any light.

Then, he stood still, at the top of the stairs, and listened.

He heard it again!

From the direction of the sound, he made out that it wasn't coming up from downstairs.

It was coming from near by.

He slowly made his way towards his son's bedroom, and there he stood still, listening at the partially opened door.

But it wasn't coming from there.

All he could hear was the sound of his son sleeping.

Then he slowly, and ever so quietly, made his way to his daughter's room.

Again, he stood still, there before the partially opened door.

But the sound wasn't coming from there either.

All he could hear was the sound of his daughter sleeping.

He then looked in the shadows up towards the attic door.

But from there he heard no sound.

As he was about to go back to bed; thinking that he must have been imagining it, didn't he again hear that strange sound.

There was only one place left to check, and that was the bathroom.

He slowly, and ever so quietly, went towards the bathroom door with feeling his way along the wall.

As he stood there still, beside the partially opened door, he could hear this wellington flapping kind of

sound.

Was he; was he afraid, Teacher?

Afraid, Jennie?

He was terrified.

Cold beads of sweat had begun to form on his forehead, and his shoulders were beginning to shake, like so.

He tried to raise a hand to his forehead to wipe away the sweat but they seemed stuck to his sides.

He could feel his knees were getting weaker, and he was beginning to find it difficult to keep standing.

Somehow, he managed to gently put his right hand against the door, and slowly, ever so slowly he began to push it open.

As he was opening it, he could see there was some sort of colourful glow filling the bath.

At this point he was really scared, and he didn't know what to do; whether it was better to switch on the light or rush back in to wake his wife.

Slowly, he entered the bathroom, and went and ever so slowly peeped into the bath.

He could feel the hairs on the back of his neck stand.

And as his view came in over the rim of the bath, like so, he saw; he saw therein what had been making that strange flapping sound.

There, almost exhausted in the bath was a fish; yes, a beautifully coloured fish; the likes of which he had never seen before.

How big was the fish, Teacher?

Oh, about this length; about two feet, Sean.

Wow!

Yes, indeed, wow.

He couldn't believe his eyes.

He had no idea how it had got there.

The window was locked, and there is no way it came up the stairs.

He himself had been the last person out of the bathroom before he and his wife went to bed.

He had definitely closed all of the faucets and had switched off the shower.

As he was standing there beside the bath pondering this, didn't the beautiful fish speak to them!

He thought he was hearing things so he tapped his ears with his hands, like this, but still he was hearing the fish speak to him.

What did the fish say, Teacher?

I am a mother fish of the river beyond who was suddenly swooped up out of my watery garden and dropped here in your bath.

Who swooped you up fish from out of your watery garden, and dropped you here in our bath?

I don't know.

It was in the early morning for golden sun was already moving along on its way.

Perhaps it was a fisherman.

Fishermen don't suddenly silently swoop down from out of the sky.

Perhaps then, fish it was a bird of some kind?

It was no bird of any kind for it had no wings.

It carried me up over the trees, and before I knew it I found myself here in your bath.

What do you need me to do for you; how can I help you?

Please; please first surround me with some water.
The man turned on the cold water faucet in the bath, and half filled it.

The fish looked bit better.

Kind Human, please return me to the river.

All right.

I will just go and tell my wife and get dressed.

The man returned to his bedroom and gently woke his wife, and then turned on the bedside lamp.

Dear?

Sorry for waking you, but I need to tell you something.

What is it, Love?

And so the man told his wife how he had been awakened by a strange sound, and that with searching around he had discovered a beautiful fish in their bath.

She being well used to his sincerity, didn't doubt him in the slightest, but got up, and slowly went to the bathroom to see the stranded fish.

Oh, you are a beauty, aren't you?

Now, don't you worry yourself any further; my husband and I will return you safely to the river.

Thank you; thank you understanding humans.

The man went downstairs and got a large tub; a plastic bath from the kitchen, and brought it upstairs to the bathroom.

It was about this size; about a yard in length, and about fifteen inches or so in width.

There he half filled it with water, and then he and his wife together gently picked up the fish and laid her in the tub.

Then, very carefully, they carried the tub with the

fish in it downstairs.

They put on their coats, hats, gloves and wellingtons.

Now, seeing that they lived at the edge of the village and were as such not far from the river, they decided to carry the tub by hand across a field to the river.

It was coming up on dawn, and they could just about see the gently flowing river.

They carried the tub with the fish in it down by the bank to a shallow spot.

When they were a little ways out: almost up to the tops of their wellingtons, they decided to gently overturn the tub to allow the fish to safely move on out into the gently flowing waters.

But, just as they were about to turn it, didn't the man half slip on a flat stone, and before they knew it hadn't the tub with the fish in it slipped from out of their hands and was now floating away from them on the waters.

They tried to grasp it but the current was that bit too fast for them.

They quickly returned to the bank, and ran along it while watching the tub with the fish in it move on along on the waters.

They shouted out to the fish: Fish; fish in the tub?

Don't you worry; don't you worry.

A way will present itself for you to be back in the river.

But they didn't receive any reply from the fish.

They wondered had she fainted or something.

As the current meandered along and along with it they saw up ahead a weir.

They were delighted and excited for definitely the tub would tumble over the weir and the fish would be set free.

But do you know what?

What, Teacher?

Things don't always work out the way we think or even imagine they will, Finbarr.

As the tub was nearing the weir didn't a cormorant just at that very moment rise up out of the water right beneath the tub causing it to jump the weir and land right side up in the river again and with the fish still in it!

Wow, Teacher!

And, Teacher, the cormorant must have hurt his head, mustn't he?

He did, Emily, and he couldn't fly straight for a few seconds, so he couldn't.

I banged my head once, Teacher against the frame of a door, and I didn't know where I was for a moment with the stinking pain of it.

Do you even know where you are now, Patrick?

Of course, I do, Aoife.

Now, as the river was going through a forest; a dark forest which had a lot of undergrowth in it, the man and his wife could no longer follow on along with it; could no longer keep watching the tub with the fish in it or even talking to the fish.

So they stood on the bank and shouted out that they were very sorry that they could not return the fish to the waters.

And without receiving any reply they returned to their house with heavy hearts.

Even though the man was the one who had slipped

and fallen, and his falling the main reason why the tub had got away from them, his wife didn't blame him for it, for she knew it could have been she who had slipped instead.

That is a very important thing to keep in mind, that if for instance something happens, don't be so quick to blame someone, but think first rather that it could have been you too who had caused it to happen.

We will, Teacher.

And; and what happened then to the fish in the tub?

Well, Anthony the river floated the tub through the dark forest until it emerged out into a lovely valley with the grandest of hills sitting on either side of it.

And the sun was already climbing high into the sky.

As the tub was coming along wasn't there a great deer who was supporting a mighty crown of antlers sipping away contentedly for himself by the water's edge.

And as the tub came along it veered into some rushes.

The fish realizing that the sky was no longer moving on by began like to sob and cry, and feel that she was never going to get back into her home; into her lovely watery garden.

She felt so close to it, yet so far away.

The deer, wondering what the sound was came sauntering along with his great crown in the air.

And with reaching the tub in the rushes lowered his head and peered in and said to the fish.

Fish, what are doing in such a small lake?

It is a long story, Mr. Deer.

Can you get me out of this small world, and let me return to my wide home?

Just one moment, fish.

The deer carefully lowered down his great antlers, and picked up the tub in them, and carried it out of the rushes and laid in on the bank at the water's edge.

There, he very gently rolled the tub over with his nose thus allowing the fish to safely wiggle and slide on into the waters.

With leaping this way and that way in the water, the fish thanked the great deer for his understanding and kindness.

And the deer feeling very happy to be of help returned to sipping of the waters.

Oh, that was a great story, Teacher.

Not so fast; not so fast, Ciaran as it is not yet over.

Oh?

Yes, one month to the day after helping return the fish to the river, the man and his wife received a very pleasant surprise in the post.

They had won a holiday for a family of four to a land far away.

And in their hearts they knew that somehow the beautiful fish had something to do with it.

And what about the great deer, Teacher?

Didn't he find a lovely wife, Anthony for himself that very same morning when he strolling in the hills.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile

phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

2

RESTING ON THE HORIZON

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about a Man who goes to Start his Car very Early in the Morning.

It was about six-thirty of a cold dark winter's morning as he walked along the street to the carpark.

One or two streetlights were flickering as if they were going to go out any minute.

It looked like he was the only one in the village that was up and about.

The odd car or truck went flying through the village on their way to somewhere else.

As he turned off the street into the carpark he noticed down the street the full beams of a truck with two warning lights flashing on its cab.

He knew the truck to be the garbage truck.

They always collected once a week and it was always very early in the morning.

It seems they started their collection about four-thirty while everyone was still asleep, and the streets were all but empty.

I have never been up at that time, Teacher.

And me neither, Teacher except for the night I had an upset stomach and I had to go to the toilet.

And as he entered the carpark he noticed the ground was glistening as it was very cold.

He could feel the cold making his eyes water.

He walked very slowly over the lovely glistening world of many colours.

Then he stopped to look up at the sky as was his habit, for he loved seeing what was going on up there too.

Although the carpark lights were inclined to block out the sky he could still see much of it when he put his hands up round his eyes, this way, and his arms that way.

He loved to look northwards to see if Polaris: the North Star was out.

And sure enough it was, and below it was the collection of stars called Cassiopeia which looks like a 'W' resting on the horizon at that hour of the morning.

And way up high he could see the Plough.

This group of stars is called by different names in different parts of the world.

I know, Teacher that in America, where my Uncle lives, it is called the Great Bear.

But I never think it looks like a bear.

I think it is more like some sort of bent out of shape spoon.

And he turned about and looked over to the southeast where he could see the planets Venus and Saturn, and in the south Mars, and high in the southwest bright Jupiter.

Teacher, I saw in the news that scientists think there is another planet in the Solar System, but that it is so far from the sun they can't see it.

And because they can't see it they can't find it.

Yes, I heard that very interesting news too, Colin.

Thank you for sharing it with us.

You are welcome, Teacher.

As he was nearing his car he noticed it was of the same glistening as the ground.

He pressed the key to automatically open it.

He heard the familiar click of the door unlocking

but when he went to open it it wouldn't open as it was frozen stuck.

So he gave the door a slight bang with this part of his hand around the lock and the frame, and then he tried to open it but it was still stuck.

Twice more he slightly banged round the lock and frame before it finally opened.

Remember, it is always good to be patient, especially in situations like that.

My Daddy, Teacher is inclined to be a bit impatient when it comes to things like that.

Well, he sat into his car and tried to start it but it wouldn't start.

He paused and tried a second time with gently pumping the accelerator pedal, and then it started.

He then switched on the heater almost to the maximum and thought to himself would he or wouldn't he get out of the car for a few minutes while it was heating up.

He loved having a walk about at that hour of the morning, even if was only for a few minutes.

Was the moon there, Teacher?

No, the moon wasn't there, Heather.

Now, as he was walking around nice and slowly with his hands deep in his pockets and his hood tied in well about his ears, he could hear the slow rumbling of the garbage truck coming up the street.

He couldn't yet see it because of the street houses, but he could sure hear it.

It sounded like a lion and a tyrannosaurus rex in that it was half growling and half roaring.

It was a strange animal kind of mixed up sound.

Within a minute or so it slowly passed in front of the gate of the car park; first its nose and then its body and finally its tail.

The man thought that his eyes were playing tricks with him for he was sure the truck had no driver in it.

It seemed to be driving itself.

It was moving very slowly with the lights flashing on its cab.

He waited a moment to see if there was anyone coming on behind loading the garbage bins, but there was nobody.

He had to think quickly as to what to best do.

The truck was still slowly moving along.

He ran up alongside it, and could clearly see that there was nobody driving it.

He tried to jump up on the step to open the door but he slipped and fell back on the ground.

The surface felt hard; very hard.

Anyway he got right back up and ran after the truck.

Again he tried to reach for the door handle, but didn't and he again fall to the frosty street.

And again he got right back up and was more determined than ever to open the door.

This time he managed to grab the handle, and with holding on to a bar just beside it he was able to open the door and jump in.

As soon as he straightened himself up in the seat the door slammed shut and automatically locked itself!

He was locked in.

He grabbed the steering wheel and tried to turn it to the left and then to the right, and then to the left and then to the right, but it just would not turn for him.

He tried to press the break pedal but it would not go down.

He tried to pull the handbrake but that too wasn't responding.

It was if the truck was completely ignoring him.

By this stage the sweat was thick on his forehead, and his hands were slipping on the steering wheel.

Suddenly!

Do you know what happened?

Maybe; maybe, Teacher it suddenly stopped.

Rather than stop, Cormac, didn't it start to pick up speed.

When he first saw it, it was only going at about five miles an hour but it was already now up to almost fifteen.

It seemed like it had a mind of its own because there was a bend in the road at the top of the village, and didn't the steering wheel turn with it and was now heading off out into the countryside.

He tried and tried to do something; to do anything to stop it, but nothing worked for him.

Everything seemed to be jammed.

At this stage it was already up to twenty-five miles an hour and getting faster.

He was growing more and more terrified in case a car or another truck would be coming against them as the road was not that wide.

Up ahead in the distance, and to his horror he could see the lights of an oncoming car, and it was nearing quite quickly.

Usually people going to work that early in the morning have a habit of driving very quickly.

My Daddy, Teacher is always driving quickly.

And my Mammy is always telling him to slow down as there is no rush.

She even said to him one day, that if he was in such a rush he should have left home yesterday, and he would be in plenty of time then.

He only slowed down a small bit at her word though.

He could see the car was getting closer and closer and that the truck was getting faster and faster.

To his absolute horror he noticed that the truck was driving in the middle of the road, and that the continuous unbroken double white lines were in the center of the windscreen as it was going along.

The sweat was now drenching the front of his jacket.

And not alone that but it was half blinding him too.

He could taste its saltiness on his lips.

He was trying to wipe it away but it still kept falling.

He tried to break the glass on the door with his elbow, but he only hurt his elbow, for the glass was much harder and stronger than his elbow.

One more bend; just one more bend and they would be on a head on collision.

He was now in such a state of fear that he almost couldn't move a muscle.

His two hands were as if they were part of the steering wheel, and his legs were as if stuck to the pedals.

Just as they were both approaching the bend didn't something unbelievable happen.

Didn't the truck suddenly all of its own accord make a sharp turn to the left and went ploughing through an old iron gate and into a field!

The headlights which had been on full beams shone

like two great torches across the frosted grass.

Was it still going fast, Teacher?

Fast, Niamh?

It was going faster than when it was on the road.

Surely it was now doing near on sixty miles an hour.

It burst over ditches from one field into the next.

It looked like nothing was going to stop it.

Then a thought came to him, that maybe soon it will run out of diesel and so it will then stop.

But when he looked at the fuel gauge he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

The tank was reading full to the brim.

He was now at a total loss as to know what to do.

He managed to release one hand off the steering wheel and get his mobile phone out of his pocket.

He was about to call 999 when the truck bounced over a rock and the phone went flying out of his hand, hit the roof and fell on the floor over on the passenger's side.

It was at this very moment he saw up ahead in the lights something that looked like a giant wall.

He couldn't make out what it was.

And then he realised they were heading into an old abandoned stone quarry.

They were heading right for the wall at over a hundred miles an hour!

There was nowhere to turn to as the giant quarry wall was arching around on either side.

He said to himself, this is it; I am going to die.

He could feel he was going to faint but he didn't.

The truck went right into the wall of the quarry, but there was no smash.

He and the truck were now inside the rock; they

were in a lovely place where there was sunshine and lovely trees and fields, rivers and streams.

And there were beautiful birds flying about in a lovely blue sky among wispy white clouds.

Then he could hear this tapping sound; this tap tap tap tapping, and he looked around, and to his amazement he could see his wife.

He thought that is very strange.

How could she be there?

He opened the door, and then realised to his great joy that he was still sitting in his own car.

He must have dozed off while it was warming up instead of getting out of it to go for his usual walk about the carpark.

His wife told him to hurry up or that he would be late for work.

He kissed her goodbye and drove off slowly.

Along the way he came up on a garbage truck that was crawling along as the men emptied the bins into it.

And as he passed he took one look to see if it had a driver in it or not.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

3

TALKING TO AN INVISIBLE
BUTTERFLY

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about what
Happened to a little Girl when she
was on her Way to School.

There was this little girl, and her name was
Joanie.
She was about the same age as Ciara and
Brian here; about nine and a half or so.
Teacher?

Yes, Ciara?

I am almost ten, Teacher.

Indeed, you are Ciara.

Indeed you are.

Now, every morning Joanie would get up in time for
school because she loved going to school.

Her mother would always softly call her, saying,
Joanie; Joanie, pretty Joanie pretty, it is time to get up for
school.

And she would give her mother the loveliest of
smiles and would sit up in bed and then stretch her arms
out, and then jump out of bed.

After a nice breakfast she was ready to head off
down the road to school.

At the gate her mother would give her a big hug and
kiss and tell her not to be taking too long to walk to
school.

There was a reason for her saying this as Joanie
loved to take her time going and coming from school.

Maybe if anyone else was walking to school along
that way it would only take them about fifteen to twenty

minutes, but in the case of Joanie it could take half an hour or even longer, for she loved to take her time looking at everything along the way.

She would be looking at the trees and the flowers and saying hello to animals small and big that she would see along the way.

Joanie's house was located just outside a small village.

There was a lovely meandering river running through the field down in front of her house.

From her bedroom window, which was upstairs, she could enjoy watching the swans gracefully going along with the flow of the river below.

Her mother would remain standing at the gate until Joanie would disappear from her view around a bend in the road.

On the road to school there was a S bend; not exactly shaped so but more of a stretched S.

There was a section of the road in which she couldn't see her mother waving to her from the gate or see the village street where some of her friends would be waiting for at the corner house.

Her mother would always tell her not to be delaying too much between the bends, and Joanie who always listened to her mother would never stay more than a minute or two looking at things between the bends.

Now on this morning; a lovely sunny April morning, Joanie was just walking along up to the first bend, when with reaching it, she turned around like she always did, and waved back to her mother.

Her mother waved, and Joanie continued on happily walking along.

And of course she was saying hello to this bird and that bird; to these rabbits and those rabbits, and waving and saying hello to a horse, and a donkey and some cows and sheep in the fields.

She was interested in everything.

And the little places where she might see some ants were very familiar to her.

She knew all the little places along the way.

She knew where this bird's nest was and where a fox used like to take a shortcut, and a colourful pheasant might pop out.

And not alone was she interested in what was going on around her but she also had a great love for standing and gazing up at the sky.

I do that too sometimes, Teacher.

Very good, Owen.

She loved to see how the sun was creating different colours along the undersides of clouds.

And she would be looking out for the setting moon.

As she was walking along between the two bends, she stopped in her tracks because there was someone sitting on the stone ditch.

She got a bit of fright for she didn't expect anyone ever to be there.

Even though she got a bit of a fright, she wasn't really afraid because sitting on the mossy stone ditch was a little girl about her own age.

She was beautiful with long flowing wavy light brown hair.

She wasn't looking at Joanie but at a bird singing high up in a tree.

Joanie thought it a bit strange that her clothes didn't

look like any clothes she had ever seen before.

She had a school bag; more of a leather satchel resting on her lap.

Oh, and she was barefoot too.

Joanie being inclined as she was to say hello to everything and everyone she happened to meet along the way, said hello to the little girl, but she didn't return the greeting to Joanie.

Instead, she pulled a stem of grass and started twiddling it between her fingers.

After a moment or two, Joanie asked her her name.

I am Bridget.

I am Joanie.

Where is your house?

It is across the river there on the hillside.

Joanie found that rather strange as there was no house on that hill except an old ruin.

Then the little girl asked Joanie if she wouldn't mind her walking along the road with her.

Of course, Joanie had no problem with this as she and the little girl were becoming friends.

Joanie helped her down off the ditch, and they began to walk along together hand in hand.

It bothered Joanie that she wasn't wearing any shoes so she offered to give her hers, but the little girl said she was fine without them.

And as they walked along the little girl became very talkative, and began telling Joanie about all the different animals who lived along the way.

Now as she was telling these things, Joanie noticed that there were no such animals or even trees about.

It was as if they were both looking at two different

scenes.

This however was no hindrance to their chatting.

In the distance, Joanie could see that one or two of her friends were already waiting for her at the corner house.

She would be so excited to introduce them to the little girl for they were the nicest of friends anyone could ever have in the whole wide world.

Joanie waved to them, and they waved back.

Joanie told the little girl that they were her best friends and that they could all walk together to school.

The little girl only smiled, and didn't make any reply.

As they were nearing the corner house, Joanie's friends were urging her to hurry up or they would be late for school.

But Joanie didn't speed up her step for the little girl was a slow walker.

Joanie was about to introduce them to her newfound friend when one of her friends shouted to her and asked her who or what she was looking at and talking away to as she was coming along.

Are you talking to an invisible butterfly or bumblebee, Joanie?

Joanie was amazed and wondered why they weren't seeing the little girl who was walking beside her hand in hand.

And then in the blink of an eye the little girl vanished into thin air; she was no longer to be seen anywhere.

Joanie ran to her friends and anxiously asked them:

Didn't you see the little girl that was walking along the road with me hand in hand.

What little girl, Joanie; what little girl?

You mustn't be fully awake yet.

As they half walked and ran down the village street, Joanie was more silent than usual for she was thinking to herself about the little girl she had met.

She was a hundred percent sure that she had met her and that they had walked along together hand in hand, and were chatting about the animals, and the flowers, and the trees, and the sky.

All day long at school she couldn't get the morning's encounter with the little girl out of her mind.

When school was over she was anxious to reach the corner house so that she could run to the space between the bends to see if the little girl would still be there sitting on the mossy stone ditch as she had been in the morning.

But there was no little girl sitting on the stone ditch.

She waited around for a few minutes and then decided to run home, and to tell her mother all about it.

Her mother was surprised to see her home so early and wondered why.

After sitting down she told her mother all about what had happened on her way to school in the morning; how she had met this beautiful little girl named Bridget, and how they had walked along the road together chatting hand in hand, and how she had vanished into thin air, and how that her friends didn't see her at all.

Her mother leaned back in the chair with astonishment at Joanie's story for she knew there was some history there; some story coming from the past.

And so her mother told her this very sad story of how over a hundred years before there were people living in a house on the hillside across on the other side of the

river.

The couple who lived there had only one child; a little girl.

Now it seems the little girl used love to walk to school on her own, and just like you, Joanie, she used love to take her time going to school and returning home.

The only thing is that she used have to cross the river each time by a small old narrow rickety wooden footbridge.

Her mother would always walk down to the riverside with her to make sure she crossed over safely on the bridge, and she would always be waiting for her there when she came to crossing back over it in the afternoons.

Now of a morning, Joanie, her mother wasn't feeling very well, and wasn't able to go down to the riverside with her.

Her daddy had been away since the day before on some business and wouldn't be returning until later that night.

Her mammy had as usual told her little girl to be very careful when crossing the bridge, and to come home to her safe and sound.

The little girl went off to school on her own and safely crossed the bridge.

Her teacher later mentioned that she was a bit anxious all day about her mother.

On her way home, she found herself walking behind a cow that had somehow jumped a ditch, and was a bit lost.

As you know, cows walk away on to wherever there is some nice grass to be found.

And it is most likely that she saw some across on

the other side of the river.

Normally, cows would just walk across a river if it was shallow, but for some unknown reason, perhaps thinking it was a little too deep for her, didn't she decide instead to cross over the small old narrow rickety wooden footbridge.

The little girl not thinking there was anything to it, decided to follow on to the bridge behind the cow.

After all, she was used to seeing grownups walking after cows.

As they crossed, suddenly there was a creaking, cracking breaking sound!

Wo and behold; yes; wo and behold, Joanie, but didn't the weight of the cow cause the bridge to break and both she and the little girl fell right into the river.

Although the water was a bit deep, the cow was able to quickly stand up and walk out of it without a bother, as if nothing had happened, and straightway started eating grass on the bank.

The water was too deep however for the little girl, and so she was swept along by the current and was drowned.

Oh, Mammy that is very sad.

And the saddest thing of all, Joanie; oh, the saddest thing of all was that her body was never found.

Oh, Teacher that is so very sad.

My eyes are full of tears.

Mine too, Teacher.

And me too.

We are all in tears, Teacher.

I know; I know it is a most sad and tragic tale.

And what happened then, Teacher?

Amy, a very old man, continued Joanie's mother, who had been out walking in the fields that same afternoon, and who had seen from a distance what had happened, and who had tried to shout but his voice was way too low to reach the little girl, brought the sad story to a neighbour, who in turn ran and told the local priest, who quickly went and told the mother.

When she heard the heart-breaking news that her little girl was drowned; that she would never again be returning home to her, and that her body was lost and nowhere to be found, broke into such a painful and lonely crying that all who were in the house gathered were weeping rivers of tears.

Even the dog was howling most mournfully.

And when her husband arrived home, and when he heard the dreadful news that his one and only child; his one and only daughter was drowned and lost for ever more, lost his mind there and then, and for the rest of his life never again came outside the front door of the house.

And the story goes, Joanie that her mother would every afternoon go down to where the small old narrow rickety wooden footbridge used to be to wait patiently for her little girl to come along singing her happy songs.

Down through the years people have heard a woman crying down by the river but there was nobody there.

People made out that it was the little girl's mother crying and crying for her to come home.

And there have been stories too that a little girl; a very beautiful little girl, just like you described Joanie, has been seen down through the years between the two bends on the road.

It seems that is where she used come up from the river path to join with the road to school.

Did you ever see her, Mammy?

No, Joanie, I never saw her.

You would have liked her, Mammy; she was very nice.

I once though, when collecting reeds down by the river, thought I heard the sound of woman crying and calling out what sounded like the name Bridget.

But there was nobody there.

Perhaps I had imagined it, I thought or that perhaps it was the sound of the wind in the reeds.

And that night as Joanie lay in bed she wondered if she would meet the little girl again the next day, but she didn't.

In fact, she never again met her, but in her heart she always treasured their meeting.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

4

PLAY IN THE MISTY RAIN

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about what Happened to a certain Puppy.

There was this farmer who had a lovely border collie, and she had a litter of five very healthy puppies.

Four of them were black and white just like the mother, but the fifth puppy had a brown back and white and black belly more like his father.

Three of his paws were black with his front left being white.

He looked like he was wearing a white sock.

How about his tail, Teacher?

Oh, it was brown and white, Amy with little streaks of black in it.

And although he looked very different from his brothers and sisters, he looked very handsome.

All the puppies had a great liveliness about them and were always playing with each other and their mother and father.

As some of you will well know, puppies born on a farm have plenty and plenty of space to run around.

The farmyard is their playground.

As the puppies were getting older and bigger they were inclined to extend their playing area beyond the farmyard itself, and were both by choice and unknown to themselves every day moving that little bit farther out from their home.

When they were about six to eight weeks old they were now playing in the nearby fields, and sometimes

would even venture off down the farm entrance avenue to the main road.

From being so used to farm machinery about they had got quite used to these big iron animals who moved around on big black rubbery paws.

So whenever they scented, heard or even saw these animals approaching they would hide away until they had passed.

On a misty wet morning.

You know the kind of mist I mean; the kind that is not quite yet rain but it really gets into your clothes.

Now normally puppies don't go out and play in that kind of weather; preferring instead to stay at home tucked in against each other and their mother.

But there is always one puppy who is different, isn't there?

There is, Teacher.

Well, one of the puppies decided he wanted to go out and play in the misty rain.

So he jumped up and went and stood at the door of the shed, and took one good look around, and then in a burst of delight ran right out into the rain.

The mother saw this and barked at him to come in but he didn't want to listen to her, at least not for a little while.

His brothers and sisters were looking out at him with wonderment but they weren't budging.

They were feeling ever so cosy right where they were.

But then one of his sisters realising that it looked like great fun, jumped up and ran out to join him.

In no time at all weren't all the puppies running

about and playing in the misty rain.

The mother stood at the shed door looking out at them, and every now and then she would give a soft bark or two urging them to come on back in.

But in her heart she knew this was mighty fun, and didn't really want them to come on back in until they had played all they wanted to.

She had been a puppy herself once and in some ways still had that lovely puppy feeling deep within her.

As does often happen, didn't the misty rain very quickly turn to heavy rain, and all out of the blue there was a loud clap of thunder!

The puppies got an awful fright and went speeding back to the shed and slid in the door in behind their mother.

But wait a minute, only four puppies had returned to the shed.

The mother went anxiously looking around the shed for the missing one.

She went to the door a few times and loudly barked out; anxiously calling for her puppy to come back.

Then she couldn't bear it any longer so she told the other puppies to say where they were, and she ran out into the pouring rain.

There was a flash of lightning and a very loud peal of thunder, even louder than the first one when all the puppies had been out playing.

She was really scared as she frantically looked here and there for her missing puppy.

But alas, the puppy was nowhere to be found.

Maybe the puppy was hiding somewhere and too afraid to come out, she thought.

In the pouring rain she couldn't scent so well.

With a heavy heart she had no choice but to return to the shed and there to keep the other four from being too afraid.

It seems what had happened was that when the five puppies were all out playing together in the misty rain, the clap of thunder had frightened them, and whereas four of them had gone speeding back to the shed to their mother, the fifth had gone off running like mad in the opposite direction.

Before he knew it he was already out of the farmyard, and had crossed five or six fields, and had ran into a small grove of trees where he hid from the rain in an old fallen tree trunk.

Yes, you will have guessed it by now, but the puppy that had ran off was the one with the left front white sock.

And when the rain had stopped, and the sun again shone, his mother and his brothers and sisters anxiously went out about looking for him all over the farmyard, but he was nowhere to be found.

After the last drops of rain had stopped dripping from off the entrance of his temporary house, and after he was sure that there was no more lightning and thunder, he slowly emerged from the old tree trunk.

The sun was shining and in the distance he could see a most beautiful rainbow.

He had no idea at all where he was.

He tried to scent the ground; he tried to scent the air but he couldn't pick up any familiar scent, not even that of his own.

As such, he had no idea from which direction he

had come.

He couldn't even pick up any of the familiar scents of the farmyard or that of the big iron animals or their rubbery paws.

It was as if all his familiar scents had all been washed away in the rain.

And on top of that, hadn't he started to sneeze and that made any hope of scenting quite impossible.

He slowly came out from the safety of the log, and the grove, and sat down on the grass and licked his paws in the sunshine.

The sunshine on him felt nice.

It reminded him of the cosiness of his mother and brothers and sisters.

Then suddenly, he started missing them terribly and began crying out for them.

When he had eventually stopped crying, and sniffled himself into a state where he could think clearly, he decided to get up.

He gave two quick licks to his front paws and with an attitude set off walking.

He felt the time for crying; the time for waiting and feeling sorry for himself was over, and that now he should do something about this new situation in which he found himself.

He is a brave little puppy, Teacher.

He is indeed, Thomas.

Now, he could have started off walking in this direction or that, but being the clever puppy that he was, he decided to walk in the direction of the sun, because he felt the sun was looking out for him.

It was the heat and the light of it that gave him this

kind of confidence and hope.

After walking for a good bit he was nowhere at all near the farmyard, in fact he had walked and walked even farther than ever from the farmyard, and was now walking in the fields of another farm.

If we were to calculate by the number of fields he had passed through they would easily amount to about nine or ten or more.

It was by this time, about the same time we go home from school, that he was feeling quite exhausted and very hungry.

He had no idea what to do.

He tried licking and tasting the sunlight but it didn't feel as if he was taking in anything.

He tried eating some grass but it tasted awful.

He was at a loss as to what to do.

Now, as he was half plodding along, beginning to feel very miserable for himself, didn't he hear what sounded like barking.

He thought he was imagining it.

He was now even having difficulty differentiating between sounds.

All sounds sounded to him as if they were the sounds of his mammy and daddy; the sounds of his brothers and sisters.

Then do you know what he saw a little ways over from him?

What, Teacher; what did he see?

He saw, Martin a little ways over from him, a mother fox playing about in the sunshine with her two cubs.

The cubs looked about the same size as himself.

The three of them were having a great time tumbling this way and that way.

They were playing with their mother and each other like he and his brothers and sisters played with each other and their mother.

He sat down and found himself feeling more and more sorry for himself for he didn't know what to do.

He hadn't even the energy to attempt a bark.

They looked similar to his brothers and sisters, and the mother looked a bit like his own mother, but in truth more like his father.

Pulling some courage together he decided to get up and slowly approach them.

When the mother fox scented him approaching, and then saw him, she told her cubs to quickly return to the safety of the den while she would go and check him out.

The puppy was feeling so tired that he hadn't the energy to run away.

He just stood there, and let the fox come and sniff him.

After walking about the puppy three or four times she gave a gentle bark at him which he understood to mean, come follow me.

And so the puppy followed after the mother fox into her den.

There he met the two cubs, and because they felt no harm from him, they welcomed him as he if he were their own brother.

And the puppy had a fine drink of milk from the mother fox.

For the rest of the afternoon and all that night the puppy slept like a log.

He was so happy to be with others, and felt happy to have had some milk to drink, and even the mother fox had brought back something for them all to eat.

The days and nights went by and the puppy grew in size and strength with his two cousins of the fields.

They played with each other in the field in front of the den, and they followed the mother fox whenever she would let them follow her.

He never strayed from the other two cubs; always he stayed playing within sight of the den.

And as the puppy and the cubs were growing he could notice that he was bigger than them, and in time even that bit bigger than the mother fox.

Howsoever, this made no difference whatsoever to anything, in that they all loved each other and all looked out for each other.

Now one day; a lovely bright day, the foxes, and by this time the now dog were enjoying just lying about in the sun and letting the wispy cloud world go by, when suddenly they heard in the far distance what sounded like a pack of dogs impatiently barking.

And there was this thundering sound of galloping horses, and the piercing sound of a bugle.

The mother fox knew immediately who they were and what it meant.

She told her two young foxes to go hide in a particular place while she and the dog would try and lead the hounds away off across the countryside.

The dog had proved himself to be a very fast runner; faster than his two cousins and even the mother fox.

Off the two of them ran at an almighty speed in and

out through bushes and trees; this way and that, and even crisscrossing each other's tracks.

After running and running for about two miles, the mother fox began to feel quite exhausted, and felt she couldn't run very much farther.

Anxiously they looked around for a place to hide.

They saw a cave on the other side of a stream so they leapt across the stream, and the dog told the mother fox to go deep inside the cave while he would lead the hounds off on a wild chase cross the countryside.

But before doing so however, he got her to lick his back, tail and paws so that he would be carrying her scent on him.

The mother fox went deep into the cave while the dog jumped back across the stream and ran round and round in circles this way and that three or four times.

He ran up and down the stream a few times.

He even stopped and peed against a tree just to mix up the confusion of scents a little bit more before heading off at an almighty pace in and out and over and about through thistles, nettles and briers.

He ran through woods and in and out of groves; he jumped into this stream and that, and even ran along in the streams wherever he could.

He was very clever, Teacher wasn't he?

He was indeed, Julia.

He ran and ran until he arrived at the bank of a river.

He ran up and down along the bank until he came to a shallow stretch.

There he waded into the water.

As he was swimming across he thought to himself

that the hounds will think that he crossed the river, so he intentionally let himself be carried on along with the current for a good stretch of the river.

He was beginning to feel rather tired.

Just then a log came floating on by and he managed to pull himself up on to it.

Thereupon he sat as it floated down the river for a mile or so.

He couldn't get even the faintest scent of the hounds anymore nor could he hear the thundering of the horses' hooves or the sound of the bugle.

When the log neared the bank he jumped off.

All that night he lay asleep in a quiet place.

He was feeling so sore.

Every muscle in his body seemed to be aching.

Come the dawning of the new day he set out in search of the cave where he had left the mother fox.

Eventually he found it, but the mother fox wasn't in it.

He thought to himself she must have left and was probably making her way back home to her cubs.

As he was half walking and half running this way and that way about the area he picked up her scent and followed along after it expecting to catch up with her at any moment.

He had gone through several fields, two woods and a grove and still there was no sight of her though her sent was strong.

He passed a horse and donkey grazing in a field and barked at them as if he was asking them did they see the fox.

They both neighed to him and he understood this to

mean that they had seen her and that she had gone off in a certain direction.

In no time he reached the field of the fox's den.

There outside the entrance to the den was the mother fox stretched out on the grass enjoying the sunshine while her two cubs were licking her paws.

He ran and licked her face and the faces of his two cousins.

The dog never returned to the farm but remained with the foxes for he felt at home with them.

There have been stories of people having seen a foxlike dog running through fields with foxes.

So, on your way home be sure and have a look in over the ditches and across the fields for you never know but you too might catch a glimpse of him.

If you are in doubt whether it is him or not look to see if he wearing a pretty white sock on his front left paw.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

5

1000 AND 600 YEARS

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about a Group of Students who were on Holidays together by a Beach.

It was a lovely warm sunny high blue sky of a summer's day when the school coach pulled into the carpark of a converted lighthouse and its outbuildings: into a one of a kind youth hostel. They were going to be staying there for a week.

And they were going to do all sorts of fun things during that time.

But most of all they were going to spend lots and lots of time playing together in the sea and on the beach.

There were forty-five students, five teachers and two parents.

The school they came from was a little different from our school, in that it was a multid denominational school.

Now before someone asks, what does that word mean, Teacher, I will tell you.

It has a lot of different sounds in it, Teacher.

It has sure enough, Cormac.

If you look around at the walls of our classroom here, you will see that there are some paintings of holy people, and over the door there is a crucifix.

Every morning we say a prayer together before we begin our lessons, and the same again in the afternoon after we finish them.

Our school is a Christian school; to be more precise a Catholic school, in that it follows and teaches the

Catholic interpretation of Christianity.

Now as you know there are many different religions in the world and all of them presenting their own particular views on life, for instance, how we came to be and how we are to live our life morally.

Many of these religions run their own schools to ensure that their children are taught about their religion.

Our school is the same in that you are taught about how to be a good Catholic; a good Christian, and a good person.

Then there are schools where children of different religions all attend together but where no particular religion is taught them within the school timetable.

That is a multidenominational school.

Teacher, then how can the children learn about their own religion?

They learn about it, Niamh from their parents, and also their parents make arrangements for them to be taught outside school time in some centre such as a church, synagogue or mosque.

Teacher, will our school always remain a Catholic school?

I hope so, Finbarr for it is important that every religion have a school that teaches their own religion.

There have been Catholic schools of one form another here on the island since the time of St. Declan and St. Patrick.

That is almost for a thousand six hundred years.

And we must never forget that there were times here in Ireland when being a Catholic priest, parent, teacher or student was considered a crime.

Teacher, aren't we all differently the same anyway?

We are indeed, Tara.

We are all differently the same.

I like the way our school is, Teacher because besides our own religion we get to learn all about other religions of the world too.

I too like it for that, Natalia.

And I like it, Teacher that you have many religions and no religion all at the same time.

Thank you, Sean.

Teacher, I love Jesus because he is a great storyteller.

I do too, Mary.

And I think, Teacher he told a lot more stories than they say he did.

Don't you think so?

I do indeed, Mary.

And so without further ado, let us continue with our story or do you know what, we will be here until tomorrow chatting away about all sorts of things.

We wouldn't mind, Teacher.

And what about your parents, and brothers and sisters and pets?

Wouldn't they also like to be chatting with you about so many things?

They would, Teacher but, ah ...

And, ah what happened next, Teacher?

Now, as you know well yourselves, children are naturally inclined to go and play with just their own close friends.

And so there on the beach it was the same, in that here and there were groups of three or four to five children playing.

At other times all the students would participate in games organized by the teachers and parents.

But most of the time everyone was left to be with

their own small group of friends.

The teachers and the parents would always sit at a distance from them; just to keep an eye on them especially when they were playing or swimming in the sea.

It was well into the afternoon and the sun was really lovely and warm, and there was a nice soft cool gentle breeze blowing in from the sea.

One group of children was sitting on the beach enjoying chatting away with each other about different things.

There was five in the group; three girls and two boys aged all about eleven or twelve.

Each of them was of a different religious belief, and you could know this not alone by the things that they were saying, but by what they were wearing.

And even though they were all in swimwear they were not all the same, in that for instance, one of the boys was wearing trunks while the other shorts; one of the girls was wearing a two-piece swimsuit, another a one-piece, and the other was almost entirely covered from her neck out to her wrists and down to her ankles.

One of the boys was wearing a silver crucifix on a silver chain around his neck.

The other had his head shaven and was wearing a brown bead necklace.

One of the girls; the same one that was dressed from her neck to her wrists to her ankles, was wearing head and facial gear that only allowed for her eyes to be seen.

Another was wearing also a kind of headgear; a headscarf and she had her hair tucked up inside it.

The third girl was wearing a thin golden headband.

You will all know that the boy who was wearing the crucifix was a Catholic, but what about the other boy; what religion did he believe in?

I know; I know, Teacher.

Yes, David?

He is a Buddhist, Teacher.

That is correct, David. How about in the case of the girls?

Teacher; Teacher?

Yes, Ciara?

The girl who was wearing the head and facial gear that only allowed for her eyes to be seen is a Muslim.

I know this, Teacher because there is a Muslim family living near my Nan's house, and sometimes I see them.

And the other two girls?

Teacher; Teacher?

I think, Teacher one might be a Jewish girl for I once watched a program on television and it was about Jews, and all the girls in it had their hair tucked up like that under a kind of headscarf.

That is correct, Natalia.

And the last girl?

Anyone?

Teacher, I think maybe she doesn't have any religion.

Quite correct, Patrick.

My Daddy, Teacher goes to mass but he says he doesn't believe in God.

How do you know, Aoife he doesn't believe in God?

I heard him one day tell Mammy, Teacher.

My Auntie, Teacher was watching television one night and she said she would like to become a Muslim so that she could wear the nice long clothes all the time and cover her face so that no one

could recognise her when she walked down the street.

She doesn't like the black coloured clothes though very much but she loves the colourful ones.

Tell your auntie, Patrick that there is so much more to being a Muslim than wearing long black or colourful clothes all the time and keeping her face covered.

I will, Teacher.

But she is always saying odd things, especially, Teacher when she is watching television.

And, Teacher; Teacher my eldest brother, Dermie who is in secondary school is always playing video games.

I think he worships them.

Diarmuid, you mean, Amy, is it?

Yes, Teacher.

We call him Dermie for short and Diarmuid for long.

So, this happy group of friends included a Catholic, a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Jew and one who didn't appear to be attached to or following any religion.

Being there on the sand in the sunshine with the lovely breeze blowing in from the sea and playing with each other was all that mattered to them.

Having different religions or none didn't have any role to play in their play.

The most important thing for them was that they all got on so well together, and greatly enjoyed being in each other's company.

Now, in saying that, didn't one from the group all out of the blue suggest that each one would build out of the sand a structure that would look like where they went to worship: the church or holy place where they go once a week or so with their families to pray and to meet other believers in their faith.

They all thought this was a great idea.

So they spread out into a bigger circle about the size of this room, and each one started to build something with their hands with the sand.

They were having a great time making such structures because it was the first time that they had ever done so.

About an hour or so passed before they had completed the sand buildings.

And each one of them was greatly pleased with what they had built.

And then they decided to introduce their structures to the group.

The Catholic boy explained that his was of his Catholic church where he and his family attend mass every Sunday.

The other boy said that his was of a Buddhist temple where he and his family would go every now and then, especially on days sacred to Buddhism.

One girl said that hers was of a Muslim mosque where she and her family go to worship every Friday.

Another girl said that hers was of a Jewish synagogue where she and her family go to worship every Saturday.

And the last girl explained that her family doesn't attend any special place of worship, and that wherever they find themselves that is where they pray in their own way.

Then Teacher, what kind of structure had she built?

It was rather of a beautiful scenery, Natasha with some trees, mountains, and valleys, and of a sky that had in it the sun, moon and many stars.

For the next while they enjoyed telling each other about their own religions, and the one girl about her views on Nature.

They were very good listeners and each one had some very interesting questions for each other about each other's religions.

They discovered that there was so much that they didn't know about each other's religions.

And no one from among them ever gave the impression or said that their religion was in anyway the best or better than anyone else's.

Neither did the girl who didn't follow any particular religion claim that her way was somehow better than all religions put together.

There was a great respect among them all.

As they were enjoying chatting away, one of them noticed that the sea was getting closer and closer to where they had built their structures; edging ever closer and closer it was to where they were sitting.

They all moved back and sat next to each other in a row to watch as the waves gently approached their structures.

And in silence they watched as the waters rolled in the doors and across the fields of the structures, and how in no time at all it had returned the scene to the levelled beach which they had found when they had first come there to play.

One or two of the children had tears in their eyes as they watched the last sections of their structure collapse into the to and fro of the waters.

The only sound to be heard was the coming and going of the waters and the blowing of the gentle breeze.

Their silence was interrupted only by the sound of a flock of seagulls gracefully gliding along overhead, and them chatting away to each other as they went.

Now one of the children with watching this wondrously transforming scene had a marvellous insight; a brilliant idea.

Which one of them, Teacher?

Which one do you all think it might be?

I think, Teacher it was the Catholic boy.

I think the Buddhist boy, Teacher.

Teacher, I think it was the Muslim girl.

I think, Teacher it was the Jewish girl.

I think it was the girl, Teacher who didn't have any religion.

It was the Muslim girl.

I was right, Teacher.

You were indeed, Ciara.

She shared with them what she was feeling when watching the sea come in and level all their structures.

And as if in a moment of insight she said: We are all the same.

And so she had an idea and did say: Let us each raise to the breeze what will fly, and toss into the waves what will sink of those accessories that identify us as being different from each other.

And each one of the children removed those things that made them appear to be different from each other religious wise.

She, by way of example took off her head and facial gear; raised it and let it fly away on the breeze.

One boy tossed his crucifix and chain into the waves; the other his bead necklace.

One girl also raised her headscarf and let it fly in the

breeze while the other raised and tossed her headband both to the breeze and the waves.

And the children were very happy, and ran along the beach like a flock of low-flying birds.

In that moment they only knew themselves to be among the best of friends, and having no such differences whatsoever.

Teacher, may I say something?

Yes; yes, of course, Ciara.

Go ahead.

I thought it might be her all right, Teacher, because once when I was over at my Nan's place, I saw one of the Muslim girls take off her head and facial gear in an apple orchard and place it on the branch of a tree while she happily practiced some ballet moves in and out between the lovely blossoms.

She must have thought that no one could see her there, but I could see her there.

And her face was truly lovely, Teacher.

She had beautiful long flowing wavy hair all the way down to her waist.

She looked like a princess out of a fairy tale.

A wonderful story with lovely imagery and beautifully told.

Thank you, Ciara for sharing it with us.

You are welcome, Teacher.

And then what happened?

Well, after a while they returned back to where the whole group was gathered for a meal.

Now some of the teachers and parents enquired of them where their religious identifiers; religious accessories had gone.

And each one of the children out of that group

answered that they had presented them to the breeze and the waves.

There was a long silence, and nobody knew what was going to be said next.

Then slowly children from the other groups started to remove their head and facial gear, scarves, bands, chains and necklaces and presented them also to the breeze and the waves.

And the breeze and waves graciously accepted each and every one of them.

The teachers and the parents looked at each other.

Then one of the parents removed her Jewish headscarf and let it fly away.

And the other parent and four of the teachers did the same with the religious accessories that they were wearing.

Either they raised them to the breeze or tossed them into waves.

So too did the coach driver.

One teacher, however didn't remove anything from himself.

He insisted that he would never remove his religious identifier.

Everybody tried to nicely coax him and tease him to do so but he wouldn't because in his mind it wasn't a right thing to do.

Thus they had no choice but to respect and accept his point of view though they would have greatly liked if he could have considered the bigger picture of the place and the moment.

Maybe by the end of the holiday, Teacher he will have had a change of heart.

Maybe so, Craig.

But it would not be an easy thing for him to do for he is the kind of person who has over time let himself become overly attached to something.

I am always wearing the same baseball cap, Teacher.

It fits me very well; I like it a lot.

It will grow so tattered, Patrick that one day it will fall down around your ears and into your eyes and cause you to trip over yourself.

Until then, Tara we will not part from each other.

Teacher, why do people have different religions?

It is the way things are, Hugh.

People love to believe in what they love to believe in.

And also as you know, there are many people who don't follow any religion.

That is what they like to do so that must be respected too.

Teacher, when they returned back to school after their holidays at the beach, did they again start wearing such religious things or not?

Sadly, Colin through pressure from their parents and even from some teachers they had to return to wearing such things, especially outside school times.

That was a pity, Teacher, wasn't it?

It was indeed, Sophie.

But those children would never forget that one glorious holiday they had had by the beach, and how they had let fly and tossed differences to the wind and the sea.

They would never forget that feeling of happy oneness they felt with each other; with the sand, the sea and the sky.

*Teacher, it would be nice; it would be real nice if everybody
was happy with each other and Nature, wouldn't it?*

It would indeed, Heather.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

*We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next
week's one.*

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile
phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

6

FOREVER RUSHING ABOUT

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:

Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Teacher, I told my Auntie what you said about there is so much more to being a Muslim than wearing long black or colourful clothes all the time and keeping her face covered, and she said to say, thank you, and to tell you that she is now more interested in Hindu clothes.

Tell your auntie, Patrick, I said, she is very welcome, and that I am glad to hear she is interested in so many different kinds of fashions.

I will; Teacher. Thank you.

Now this story, Students is about a Man who was always Rushing for Something Else.

Very far from here there lives man who used always be rushing to do the next thing whatever that happened to be.

There is a story that even when he was a baby he was rushing to do the next thing.

When his mother was breastfeeding him or giving him a bottle, he would never slow down and drink like other babies.

He would be sucking and sucking so quickly to get to the end of the feeding or the drinking that he would finish it in half the time it should comfortably take him.

Teacher, when my Mammy was breastfeeding my little baby brother, she used to have to tell him sometimes to take his time because he was hurting her.

That would be normal for nearly all babies, Heather,

but this baby that we are talking about was not your normal baby when it came to doing such things; in fact when it came to him doing anything.

And of course because he was gulping it down he was nearly half choking himself with coughing.

Even when he was sleeping he seemed to be rushing to do something or go some place.

When he was about three years of age, the story goes that he would be always quickly trying to climb up as high as he could in order to see what was beyond what he could not see.

Often he fell off of things in his attempts to see beyond.

He was so impatient with wanting to see what he could not see that he was often found running up and down the garden with his arms out stretched like a bird in the hope that he could fly up into the air and be able to see what the birds could see.

If he could see what the birds can see, he would be wanting surely to quickly see what the clouds can see; what the clouds can see, and then it would be the moon, sun, and stars.

Now there is nothing at all wrong with wanting to see from another vantage point, in fact it is most desirable.

It is just that he had no interest whatsoever in really looking at what was to be seen but rather wanted instead to rush to get to the next highest place.

There are many stories of his rushing to do the next thing when he was in primary school.

When he would wake up in the morning, he would immediately jump out of bed and rush to have a shower

and get dressed as quickly as possible, so that he could have his breakfast.

He would rush through his breakfast, so that he could as quickly as possible go to school.

The place where he sat at table for breakfast, or for any meal would be littered with cereal, breadcrumbs and splashes of either orange juice or milk, for he was always trying to eat everything so quickly that he would always mess up the table.

At times he would be trying to drink his glass of orange juice while at the same time putting a spoon of cereal and some bread into his mouth.

His mother was always telling him to slow down; telling him that everything would be waiting for him.

But did he listen to her?

Not at all, Teacher.

He would run all the way to school; not stopping to look at anything along the way or even say hello or talk to his neighbours as he wanted to get to school as quickly as possible.

When he got to school he was impatient with everything, in that he was always thinking of what was coming up next.

No sooner would he be sitting at his desk than he would be anxiously looking forward to the mid-morning break.

After the break he would be straightaway anxiously looking forward to launch.

After lunch he would be anxiously looking forward to going home.

He had little or no patience with what the teacher was teaching.

He would only write down what he was told to write; only do what he was told to do.

He wasn't really listening to what was being said as his mind was always anxiously wanting to hear what was coming up next.

Needless to say, that kind of way got him into plenty of trouble with his teachers, and he was forever failing and redoing tests because he never really listened to what was being said.

Whenever speaking his words would be tripping over each other trying to get out of his mouth.

For this reason it was hard ever to catch what it was he was actually saying.

And besides, when he would be talking to you you would be showered in spits.

When he going home from school he never slowed down to take a look across the fields or say hello to the animals or to anyone he happened to meet along the way.

He was always running half stooped over; constantly looking to the footpath or the road.

He never knew what was going on in the sky because he never took the time to look up at it.

For him the sky was either bright and that meant it was day or dark and it was night.

Now by the time he got to secondary school this rushing had not slowed down in the slightest, in fact it had got a whole lot worse.

He could hardly wait for the door handle to turn to open the door, in that he would be almost pushing the door open without opening it.

When he would get on the school bus he would always sit near the front so that he could be watching the

speedometer.

He was always half biting his lips as he watched the speed hand move.

It was just never fast enough for him.

Now don't get me wrong, it isn't that he liked speeding but rather that he was always anxious to get to where he was going or to do the next thing.

One day when in class the teacher asked him to recite a poem.

And of course he sped through it.

The teacher got angry to him and told him that if he didn't read it slowly she would give him a whole lot of extra homework.

Of course he got a whole lot of extra homework.

One afternoon, when classes were finished he was half walking half running along a corridor when he banged up against a large fish tank.

The glass cracked and then broke and the whole tank of water and fish went flooding onto the floor and right out the front door and down the steps and into a stream that ran in front of the school.

Now you might think that he had got himself in desperate trouble with the school but he hadn't because the teachers though upset were very thankful he hadn't hurt himself in any way.

But didn't his parents have to pay for a new fish tank, and stock it with fish.

My Mammy is a bit like him, Teacher.

She is always rushing around the place.

Whenever I go home from school I find something has been broken in the kitchen or something around the house is newly cracked or chipped.

My Daddy is very different.

He is very much like me; very easy going and hardly ever breaks anything.

Now, when he had finished secondary school he couldn't go on to college; couldn't go on to university because he didn't pass his final exams.

So for the first five years after leaving school he couldn't hold any job for whoever employed him could not deal with his rushing character.

He hadn't a friend in the world; not even a dog or cat would be friends with him.

Oh, he must been very lonely then, Teacher.

Indeed he was, Julia.

And it wasn't that he wasn't a nice person or a good person, for he was, but it was just that he would wear anyone out with his rushing.

Even his shadow was having a hard time keeping up with him.

One day he was sitting alone in a park in a city, and he was at a loss as to what to do with himself when he saw over from him this very beautiful girl quickly running along.

Without as much as a thought he sprung to his feet and went running after her.

In no time at all he had caught up to her.

She looked very nice, but he was as usual more concerned with reaching the end of wherever the path through the park led, than to be interested in the lovely girl.

Now you will never believe this; you will never believe what happened next.

Try us, Teacher.

Try us, Teacher we will believe.

Well, the lovely girl looked like a copy of him in the sense that she too was a person who had been all her life rushing for what was going to happen next.

And when she noticed him racing passed her she just put her head down and ran like mad after him.

It was not that either of them wanted to beat each other, no but rather it was that they both wanted to reach the end of the path as soon as they could to see what was going to happen next.

The two of them were well matched in speed for didn't both of them reach the end of the path together; both of them fell to the ground exhausted next to each other.

And as they were there on the ground, they at the very same time, turned their heads to look at each other.

In a moment they both smiled at each other and then laughed like mad.

They sat up and both of them knew that they had found in each other a companion.

As days and weeks went by they became friends but the rushing didn't stop.

They would still be rushing for this thing and that thing.

And one day they were in a big shopping centre, and were on an escalator going up to the second floor.

Of course, they felt the escalator, like anything else including lifts, was moving way too slowly for their liking.

So, as was their habit they ran up the escalator passed everyone.

But they had run up so fast that when with reaching the top they couldn't slow down enough and fell onto a

rockery that was located at the top of the escalator.

Now this wasn't just any regular rockery with nice shrubs in it but a rockery having many different types of colourful cactuses.

Needless to say, their hands and knees well remembered that day for quite some time.

My Daddy told me, Teacher that when he was the same smallness as me he tripped over a hedgehog and fell sideways into a bunch of nettles, and burnt all his right arm and leg.

He said he was very sore for a few days, and couldn't sleep at night.

So he told me never to be running around without thinking where I am.

So I have always tried to listen to him, Teacher.

Very good, Sean.

That was very good advice your daddy gave you.

As time went by these two rushers got married, and they had three children.

Now for some unknown reason weren't all the children very easy going, and greatly enjoyed whatever they were doing without being in anyway over concerned about what they were going to do next or what was going to happened next.

They got up with ease for school.

They took their time having breakfast while talking to each other and their mother.

The father used leave early for work.

The mother early on noticed the easy going way of their children, and so she learnt from them how to slow down and appreciate everything just as it was happening.

They would walk together to school and enjoy chatting with each other and saying hello to their

neighbours and the animals they saw along the way.

They would enjoy taking time to look up at the sky.

They would even stop along the way to have a short chat with old people.

At school they used love their lessons and they were always a little bit sad that a lesson was over.

On their way home from school they would enjoy looking across the fields.

How about their daddy, Teacher?

Oh, it was a different story, Brian with their daddy in that he was still forever rushing about but not to the same extent as he used to.

He had got a job with a forestry group.

After trees were felled he would have the job of trimming the trunks; of cutting off the branches.

He was very popular at work because he would cut more off in a day than would anyone else.

Of course most of the others were letting him do twice and sometimes even three times as much work as they themselves would do, and all for the same pay.

That wasn't very nice of them, Teacher was it?

No it wasn't Brian.

He however didn't overly mind about this as he was always only concerned about reaching to the last branch or even limb on a trunk.

And when he had the last one removed he would hastily and anxiously go and start work on the next trunk.

And even if some of his co-workers tried to encourage him to take his time he wouldn't listen to them.

And he would be anxious to have lunch, and then later in the afternoon anxious to go home.

When he was at home he made little or no time to

talk to his wife and their children.

He was more concerned about watching the night news on television and going to bed so that he could get up again for the next day of happenings.

And, as when he was a baby, he was forever moving about as he slept.

It was as if he was also rushing in his dreams.

Teacher, sometimes I think our dog is running and chasing something in his dreams because when he is sleeping he is moving his legs back and forth.

Our dog does that too, Ciaran, and the cat hits him a belt of her paw to stop him.

Does it stop him, Niamh?

Only for a minute or two, Jennie.

One day, when he was about thirty years of age, he was working away feverishly cutting branches off a tree trunk, when suddenly, his arms and legs, in fact his entire body, dried up and looked like tree bark.

The chainsaw had fallen out of his hands and stuck into the ground like a sword.

And he too looked like he was stuck in the ground; looked like he was a tree standing there in the forest.

The other foresters knew that there was definitely something wrong and so they quickly ran to help him.

They managed to lay him down but he was almost like a tree log with limbs on it.

There was nothing moving in him except his eyelashes, and his eyes.

He couldn't speak; he couldn't do anything for himself.

He was helpless.

Oh, Teacher, the poor man.

They rushed him to hospital; to Accident and Emergency where he remained there on a trolley in the corridor for almost eighteen hours before the busy doctors were free enough to be able to properly attend to him.

My Great Grandad, Teacher, who is eighty-eight, was left last year like that on a trolley in a hospital corridor for two days and seven hours before he was seen to.

Desperate.

A disgrace.

How is he doing these days, Anthony?

He is very good, Teacher, and tells us that he is going to live to a hundred, and then from there see if he can live even much longer.

He is great fun, Teacher and we all greatly love him.

Tell him I said, hello, Anthony, and to keep on going in the very best of health.

I will, Teacher.

Thank you.

You are welcome, Anthony.

And the same word goes out from me to all your grandparents.

Thank you, Teacher.

You are welcome.

Now, while he was waiting there on the trolley, and not being able to move any part of his body, even an inch, he began to reflect on his life, and to wonder what it was all about, and why he was forever rushing.

And as he was lying there he was thinking, am I going to be rushing now too to die.

And tears were welling up in his eyes for he was all confused and he didn't know how he could rush to die seeing that he could no longer move; could no longer do

anything.

Beside him stood his wife and his three children, and they were all in tears.

And it made little difference to them now that he was always rushing for he was their daddy and husband, and they greatly loved him.

Then a most amazing thing happened.

His youngest child, who was a little girl of only three or so, asked her mammy to raise her up so that she could look into her daddy's eyes and talk to him.

And in her own way, do you know what she said to him?

What, Teacher; what Teacher did she say to him?

In her heart, and in her own little words, Sophie she told him that after he would die he would be rushing no more but that she and her brothers and mammy would be crying after him for evermore.

With seeing her tearful eyes, and with hearing her pretty words, and receiving her love in his heart didn't his entire body begin to soften and return to normal, and he could sit up on the trolley.

And he held his bright little daughter in close against his chest.

And his wife lifted up their two boys, and they were sitting on either side of him.

And she put her arms around all of them, and the five of them as one were crying tears of gratitude and joy.

Just at that moment, a doctor came along to examine him but was shocked to see that there was nothing at all wrong with him.

He asked the nurses if there had not been some mistake in identification.

But the nurses assured him that there was no mistake; they showed him the initial examination record: Patient looks like a tree log with limbs on it.

The man, they said that had come; the man that had been lying there on the trolley unattended for almost eighteen hours, and the man that was now sitting on the trolley there before him were all one and the same person.

From that day on the man lived his life as if he were born again as a different person.

He took his time at everything.

There was no more rushing here, there and everywhere.

He would sit and listen to all his children's stories, and greatly enjoyed telling them stories of the forests.

And he would sit on the sofa and listen to every word that his wife would speak to him, and she to him would listen most attentively.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

7

STOLEN ALL HAPPINESS

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Teacher, I told my Mammy the story you told us last week about the man who was always rushing.

And when I had finished telling it she started crying and gave me a big hug and told me that from now on she would be taking her time.

And she told me to say to you, thank you very much.

*Tell your mammy, Amy I said, she is very welcome.
I will; Teacher, I will.*

Now this story, Students is about a Girl who was Keeping a Secret that she Shouldn't have been Keeping.

Saoirse was in fourth class in a school up the country. She had for some reason recently become very quite in class and would hardly speak to any of her classmates.

It was not that she didn't like to or didn't want to it was just that she was afraid to; afraid that they might ask her some questions that she would have difficulty answering without bursting out into tears.

She would no longer ask a question to the teacher about anything, but she would always answer any question the teacher gave her, and her answer used always be one hundred percent correct, for she used have an amazing memory for detail of whatever she heard or saw.

She used to be able to remember every word on a page with only having read it once through.

She used to be the best in the class in every test.
And she used always have her homework neatly done.

The principal of her school was a woman who was only concerned with teaching the lessons.

She would never ask any student why they were feeling a bit down of a morning or even how things were going on at home for them.

Otherwise, both students and parents considered her to be an excellent teacher.

It was just that you couldn't speak to her about anything if it wasn't directly related to what she was teaching in class.

I like, Teacher that you ask us about home, and also that we can easily ask you a question about anything, and that it doesn't always have to do with our lessons.

School is meant to be a place, Niamh where we can all freely talk about anything, and where we won't be laughed at or told to stay silent.

When I was your age, our teacher used always answer us with a bark of *Ciúnas!* Silence! whenever we would attempt to ask him a question about a lesson.

And of course we would never be allowed to ask him about anything unrelated to what he was teaching in class.

That must have been very hard on you all, Teacher.

It was indeed, Ciaran.

Teacher, did he tell you all any stories anytime?

Not ever a single one, Heather.

Oh.

Saoirse was not a happy girl.

You would never see a smile on her face.

Yet, her face wasn't glum or mournful, rather it just wasn't a happy face.

And nobody had ever seen her get angry over anything.

Sometimes her classmates would ask her why she was so quiet; why so sad looking, but she would never reply to such questions and the like.

Instead, she would put her head down and start reading or writing something.

Inside she very much wanted to talk to them but there was something blocking her from telling them anything.

When they were out in the playground she would always be sitting on her own.

She wouldn't take part in any fun; not even in a game of hopscotch.

She wouldn't even play hopscotch on her own.

You might think she was brooding or looking for attention but she wasn't.

It was just that she had lost the spirit to play.

There was one game however that she would participate in from time to time and that was hide-and-seek.

She was able to do it very well rather than play it very well, for she would never be laughing like any of the other children would when playing it.

She could quickly find all of her classmates, but they weren't always able to so easily or so quickly find her.

She was really good at going a hide.

Teacher, I like playing jumping rope.

When my cousin visited us from America one time he taught my brother and me a funny song for playing it.

How did it go, Jennie?

Well, I can't remember all the words well, Teacher but it went something like this.

I had a little puppy,
his name was Tiny Duffy.

I put him in the bath,
to see if he could swim.

He drank up all the water in,
and all the scented
soap did eat.

And the next thing we knew
was he had bubbles
in his teeth.

In came the doctor,
(*person jumps in*)

In came the nurse,
(*person jumps in*)

In came the lady with
the alligator purse.
(*person jumps in*)

Out went the doctor,
(*person jumps out*)

Out went the nurse,
(*person jumps out*)

Out went the lady with
the alligator purse.
(*person jumps out*)

Oh, let's try it after school, Jennie.

It sounds great fun.

Okay, Tara.

I will teach it to you all.

Now, even though Saoirse always looked sad at school; school was one if not the only place where she felt happiness in her understanding of happiness.

Home was the place where she felt the least happy.

And that is the one place where she should have been feeling the happiest of all, shouldn't she?

She should, Teacher.

I am as happy, Teacher at school as I am at home and at home as I am at school.

That is wonderful, Cormac.

Her mother used to drive her to school in the mornings in this black tinted glass dark moss green muscular car, and collect her again in it in the afternoons.

Rarely had anyone ever seen her mother as she would never get out of the car.

Only she would lean over and partially open the door for Saoirse to get in.

When Saoirse would see the door opening she would straightway run and hop in and away they would go.

Nobody ever heard her mother say hello to her, or she to say hello to her mother.

One time though one or two students had caught a side glimpse of her mother's face.

It had in it a big dark bluish bruise right beneath her left eye, and her face had a similar type of sadness in it as was being seen in Saoirse's face.

On the way home from school her mother would always ask her the same questions about how her day was, and she would always give her the same answers.

Although her mother knew for quite sometime that there was something always bothering her she didn't have

the courage to ask her outright what it might be.

Up to about six or seven months before our story is taking place, Saoirse was always a very carefree, and a very cheerful person who loved to talk about so many things, and was always asking questions of everyone, and especially of her teachers.

She had a thirst to know things.

And there was so much to be known that she felt a day wasn't long enough to take in all that could be known.

In fact some nights she didn't want to fall asleep when reading a book.

Often her mother would find her asleep with a book almost covering her face.

When she would wake up in the morning she had this habit of going back and rereading the last page she had been reading before she had fallen asleep.

And it is this last page that she used love to be thinking about on her way to school.

But all her happiness; all her thirst for knowledge was suddenly stolen from her.

Stolen, Teacher?

Yes, Natalia.

It was stolen from her just as if someone had broken into her room in the middle of the night and had taken away all her most precious things.

And it was about this time too that she had stopped asking questions to the teacher about anything.

All answers she gave to the teacher were no longer one hundred percent correct but more like one hundred percent incorrect.

She couldn't remember things that she had read.

She was quickly dropping from being the best in the

class in every test to being nearly the worst.

And her homework was a total mess.

Something clearly was not right in her life.

I wonder what it could be, Teacher.

We will have to see, Craig.

Saoirse was an only child, in that she had neither a brother nor a sister.

And not alone that but her daddy was no longer in this world.

Oh. How so, Teacher?

Well, Emily, sometime soon after Saoirse was born her daddy, who was a passenger airline pilot died when some not so nice people blew up the plane in which he was on while it was being refuelled in an airport.

It was so very sad and so very hard on Saoirse's mother.

Then one day, about three years after that terrible tragedy, she happened to meet a man whom she thought was a good man, and so she decided that she and Saoirse would move in and live with him without getting married.

He was twenty years older than her but that wasn't a problem for her.

Maybe, Teacher she was feeling very lonely.

I think so, Aoife.

Saoirse lived in a big house in the countryside that had a long avenue of very old trees lining it.

It seems the house was three to four hundred years old.

The family who had originally owned it had down through the years eventually ran out of heirs, in that the last member of the family, who was a woman, didn't have any children, and so there was nobody to hand the house

down to.

After she died the house was put up for sale but nobody was interested in it.

Five years passed, and ten more before it was finally sold.

It was bought by Saoirse's mammy and this man with whom she was living with even though it was way beyond their means.

Saoirse's mother didn't want to buy it; didn't want to have anything to do with it.

She said the place didn't give her a good feeling, and besides there was an awful lot of work needed to be done in it to make it liveable in again.

Howsoever, the man insisted that they buy it.

And so they bought it.

When her daddy was alive, Teacher where did they live?

Oh, in a pretty cottage by the sea, Patrick that had a lovely lighthouse nearby.

As I mentioned, the big old house was in very poor condition so a lot of work had to be done on it, and a lot of money was poured into it without it making any significant difference.

They were as such never able to completely renovate it because as in the case of all old houses there is something needing to be done all the time.

That is very true, Teacher. My Daddy is always doing something to our house.

Sometimes a water pipe is leaking another time it is the roof.

The front door is always getting stuck in the rain, and the wind comes in around the windows when it is blowing really strong.

Sometimes it even comes up through the floorboards.

Every night since she was a baby Saoirse's mammy

would always come in to her room to kiss her goodnight.

Sometimes her mammy's man friend would also come in together into her room to kiss her goodnight.

Then for some reason lately he had started to come in every night with her.

And then from time to time he would also come back in later on his own, and he would again kiss her goodnight and pat and tuck in her blankets.

Sometimes she would be still awake when he came in, but most times she would have already fallen asleep.

When he kissed her on the forehead his breath smelt not nice; it smelt sour as if he had been drinking a mixture of orange juice, washing-up liquid and cough syrup.

As time when by there was gradually a change taking place in Saoirse's face in that she was slowly becoming more and more sad, and she was more and more less inclined to ask questions of others or even talk to others.

Now because her mother was always busy with something related to her job, she didn't take time to notice that Saoirse was becoming less and less happy.

She thought it was something to do with school or something she had read or had watched on television.

Her mother's man friend was always very friendly to Saoirse especially at meal times, and he would always be trying to impress Saoirse's mother by being all interested in her and her mother.

This was only a show though for in his heart he wasn't really interested in how either of them had spent their day.

This was the way of life in Saoirse's house, and during all this time she was becoming more and more

unhappy.

The only comfort she had was in reading, and playing with her cat.

She had no mobile phone because her mother's man friend would never allow her to have one.

She would relate to some of the characters in the books she read.

And she would oft times imagine that she was a character in a story.

She would tell the cat some things but the only problem was that the cat didn't care.

It is not that he wasn't nice to her or anything, but as you know it is just the way cats are.

They will give you the impression that they are listening to you very carefully, but they couldn't be bothered what you tell them as long as you give them some food and milk.

Isn't that right?

It is, Teacher.

Teacher, my cat has twenty or more faces.

I counted them, and I don't know which one is his main face.

Maybe each one is his main face, Brian.

I don't know, Teacher.

It is hard anyway to make him out.

Every night as usual, Saoirse's mammy and her man friend would together go into her room to say goodnight to her.

And as usual the man would come back in after a while and he would be sitting by her bed and patting and tucking in her blanket about her.

And sometimes he would even enter her room before it was time for her to get up for school, and he

would be again patting and patting and tucking and tucking her blankets in about her.

She didn't like him to be doing that at all; no she didn't like it at all.

She didn't like him to be doing that at all at all.

Teacher, I don't understand what there is wrong with patting and tucking in blankets because my Mammy and Daddy always do it for me.

And I really like them to do it because it keeps be nice and warm all night long.

That is great, Martin.

That is the way it should be.

But the man in the story it seems was doing it very roughly, and for that reason Saoirse didn't like him to be doing it.

I see, Teacher, I think.

Martin, my Granddad always says that what we don't know or understand today we will tomorrow, and if not tomorrow, then the day after or maybe next week or month or even next year.

I will wait and see so Emily to know if your granddad's words are right.

And I will tell you if they are or aren't.

Of course they are right, Martin because my Grandad is really brilliant, and he has travelled the whole wide world so he has, and this has made him to know so many things.

Then one night, as the man was leaving her room after patting and tucking in her blankets, he turned and said to her in a soft voice that there was no need for her to tell her mother that he comes back in to pat and tuck her in during the night.

He said it would be their little secret.

At first she thought this was fine because keeping

secrets was part of life.

Even her mother always seemed to be keeping some secrets from her.

And the man, well; he seemed to her to be a walking secret.

She could sense though that something was not right but she did not know what that might be.

As time continued on by, the man was no longer telling Saoirse in a soft voice not to tell her mother about what they were doing at night, for he had now switched to warning her not to tell her.

And not alone not to tell her mother but to tell anyone at school, and especially not to dare tell a teacher.

And he threatened that if ever she attempted to do so he would lock her and her cat away in a hidden room in the basement of the house, where they would never again be found.

This is the state of mind she was in when we started the story.

She was always looking ever so sad.

Now, one day at school an occasion came for her to start talking about the not so nice things that her mother's man friend was doing to her at night.

One of her classmates was talking about his family, and he happened to mention that he saw his uncle trying to kiss his younger sister like his daddy kisses his mammy.

Somehow, Saoirse could feel that there was something not right.

An uncle does not kiss his niece like a mammy and daddy kiss each other.

They are simply not the same.

And she began to think to herself that what the man

was secretly doing to her at night wasn't right either.

This thought grew strong in her mind, and do you know what she done next?

Maybe, Teacher she had the courage to tell her mother.

She had, Laura.

Well done.

She knew she couldn't tell her classmates; she knew she couldn't tell her teacher as she was never interested in what went on outside school or in the children's homes.

There was only person she could tell, and that was her mother.

Of an afternoon in the lovely month of May, as they were driving home from school, Saoirse suddenly burst out crying.

And as she continued to cry and cry her mother decided to pull over.

Now it just so happened that they were near a beautiful park, and the mother went and pulled a rug from the booth, and the two of them went and sat in the park by a shimmering pond that had some ducks and other water birds paddling about in it.

There were lovely fragrances floating in the air.

They sat there on the rug and her mother let her cry and cry away as much as she needed to.

She didn't say anything to her but put an arm round her.

After a good bit of time had passed, Saoirse stopped crying.

She had cried all she needed to cry.

She had cried so much that some of her tears had trickled down through the grass and into the pond.

When she had sniffled and sobbed a few more times

she began to slowly tell her mother about the not so nice things that her man friend was doing to her at night.

And her mother did not interrupt when she telling the story but listened very attentively.

When Saoirse had said out all that she needed to let out, her mother started to cry and cry and cry.

And she too cried so much that her tears trickled down through the grass and into the pond.

She began to tell Saoirse a story about herself; a story that she had never ever told anyone.

The story told how she had similarly had not so nice things done to her by a relative when she was a little girl about the same age as Saoirse.

She told how one day when that same relative was running after her in a field by a wood to catch her, didn't he suddenly drop dead of a heart attack.

And the accounts of how he had been acting not so nicely with her over several years died with him, for she had no courage ever to tell anyone about them.

Saoirse her daughter was the first person she had ever told the story to of what had happened to her.

How old was Saoirse's mother now, Teacher?

She was in her early to mid thirties, Julia which means that for almost thirty years she had been keeping that desperate secret locked up inside herself.

After both Saoirse and her mother had told each other everything, and after they had stopped crying, they did not go home but instead went to Saoirse's auntie; that is her mother's younger sister.

The auntie made them very welcome, and told them that they could stay with her as long as they needed to.

Not long after that the man was arrested and sent to

prison for the rest of his life without ever a chance of he being let out.

Saoirse's mother sold the old monstrosity of a house and the black tinted glass dark moss green muscular car and she rebought the pretty cottage by the sea that had the lovely lighthouse nearby.

They must by then have been very happy, Teacher, mustn't they.

Oh, very happy indeed, Laura; very happy indeed.

And some two years later, Saoirse's mammy met a truly respectable loving man, and they with Saoirse's full approval were married.

Was he older or younger than her, Teacher?

They were the same age, David.

And the three of them lived very happily together for both Saoirse's mother and Saoirse had found a man who like her first husband was the best of husbands and who like him was also the noblest of daddies.

And after some time didn't Saoirse's mammy start expecting a baby; a baby sister for Saoirse, and then a year or so later even a baby brother for her.

And do you know who their most welcome visitor to the cottage was?

I know teacher; I know, Teacher.

Yes, Laura?

Who was it?

It was Saoirse's auntie, Teacher.

That's is right, Laura for she was the one who was alert, wise and courageous enough to convince Saoirse's mother for them to stay with her, and for her to report the man to the Gardaí and have him arrested and sent away to prison.

Saoirse returned to happily chatting away with her classmates and playing games with them, especially hopscotch.

She again enjoyed asking questions and answering questions from the teacher.

And she very quickly returned to being one hundred percent correct in her answers.

She again was able to remember every word on a page with only having read it once through.

And she soon returned to being the best in the class in every test.

Her homework was beautiful.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

Teacher?

Yes, Laura?

Stoop down to me, I want to whisper something in your ear.

Teacher, Saoirse is me; I am her.

Can you help me?

Of course, Laura.

Is your mammy collecting you after school?

Yes, *she is.*

Then tell her to drop into my office right away that

I would like to see her.

Thank you, Teacher.

You will be like the auntie in the story for me, won't you?

I will indeed, Laura.

STORY

8

FIND IN AN OLD CALENDAR

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about a
Couple; a Grandmother
and a Grandfather.

And it is a little longer than other stories.

Oh, the longer, Teacher, the better.

Fair enough, Owen.

*Yes; Teacher, we love long stories because we can imagine
more things; have more surprises; have more questions, and lots and
lots more to think about.*

Happy times, Teacher!

Happy times, Laura.

Glad to hear it.

Then, one and all, shall we begin?

Let us begin, Teacher for we are all fully listening.

So be it then, Gerard.

Now, grandmother Aine was ninety-two years old or as she would like to say herself, ninety-two years young.
Her husband, grandfather Riordan was ninety-one years old or as he used like to say, ninety-one times ageless.

In fact there was only eleven months difference between them.

So for one month every year they would be the same age.

This they looked upon as a very special time for they felt it to be different from the other eleven months.

They would do things and go places during that month that they wouldn't do or go to at other times of

the year.

For instance, they would always climb this mountain which they could see from their bedroom window.

It wasn't a very high mountain.

And maybe to say that it was a mountain was to overdo it a bit, yet it wasn't a hill either; more of an in between a hill and a mountain.

Young people would be able to climb it in an hour and a half or so, whereas it used to take them about twice that and even longer, for they would take their time and sit down and relax along the way to take in the views at different levels.

It was more like a long gradual walk to the top rather than a climb as there were no ropes or any special climbing gear involved.

Now most married couples remember their wedding anniversary at least once a year or every five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty and so on, but grandmother Aine and grandfather Riordan were different.

They had this interesting custom that they would remember the date of their wedding on that date every month.

On the morning of that day they would always wish each other happy anniversary, and they would do some small special thing for each other during the day to celebrate their wedding anniversary.

They might too for instance, treat themselves to some favourite food that they wouldn't have at any other time of the month.

At the time of our story they have just celebrated sixty-five years of marriage.

All the family came from far and near to celebrate

the wonderful event.

Their children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren all attended.

A marvellous time was had by all.

And someone in the family asked them why they were always so happy with each other.

And what do you think they answered?

I think, Teacher they said because they have always loved each other so much.

Teacher, I think they said because they have always known each other to be very patient, understanding and forgiving.

I think it was because they have always known each other to have beautiful minds and lovely hearts, Teacher.

You are all right, in that they were among some of the answers they gave.

However, the first thing they said was that it was because they have always completely trusted each other.

To completely trust someone is very difficult, Teacher.

Sometimes I think my dog trusts me completely because I can see it in his lovely brown eyes, and I can feel it from him, Teacher, but I don't always trust him yet there is no reason why I shouldn't.

I have found in my life, Natasha; found in my life, Students that trust is the greatest and most noble thing to have in any relationship.

Would trust, Teacher be greater than love?

I think it would be so, Natasha because people can claim to love someone but they might not always be putting their full trust in them.

Whereas when you can give to and receive complete trust from someone you are being in love with them.

Trust is the maker of love.

Now, grandmother Aine and grandfather Riordan

loved being in each other's company, yet they were also very happy to be doing their own things on their own, because in that way they would always be looking forward to coming together around the fire or the dinning table or going out on a walk to talk about what they had been doing or even to show each other what they had been doing.

They enjoyed attentively listening to what each other had to say about anything.

And the interesting thing was that they both considered themselves still learners even at their advanced age.

There was always something new that could be learnt they felt.

Throughout her life grandmother Aine loved music, especially classical music.

She loved watching films, and reading books.

Grandfather Riordan would never let her be without a book.

He would always drop into a bookshop and buy one for her based on her interests and what she would like to read next.

And although he loved secondhand books for himself he would always buy her a brand new book.

She never picked a book out for herself.

It is not that she couldn't or anything like that, but rather that she loved receiving a gift of a book from grandfather Riordan.

He would always make a pretty bookmark for her by cutting out and shaping a nice photograph or painting that he might find in an old calendar.

And he would always present the book to her with a

nice word written by him to her on the title page.

He would place the book in the bag in which he had bought it and place the bag on the sofa where she liked to sit.

Sometimes he would even put it a hide under her pillow.

He used loved doing this and she used loved being surprised.

And she felt through the gift of the book, the bookmarker and his inscription his loving trust for her.

Grandfather Riordan used love to write or as he would tell anyone, he loved to practice the art of writing.

Writing appears to those who don't write to be one of the easiest things in the world to do that could be done at any time of the day or even in the middle of the night; just sit down and write or type; mechanical away as you like, but there is more to it than that by far, isn't there?

There is indeed, Teacher; there is inspiration and it only comes when it feels like it, and so we have to be ready to hear it and write it down very quickly before it goes out the window or up the chimney.

What do you think inspiration is, Sophie?

I think it is a form of magic, Teacher that comes into our chest from out of the air and flows out along our arms and down through our pens on to the paper and there becomes words or down through our fingertips on to the keyboard and becoming sentences on the screen.

And it seems, Sophie it also greatly enjoys floating off the tips of tongues to become ideas in the air.

Oh, it does, doesn't it, Teacher?

Now to be able to write something that touches a reader's heart and mind is quite a challenge.

Grandfather Riordan spent years making himself available to inspiration; spent years practicing the art of expressing himself in writing before he had his first book published.

Everyday he would be up in the attic practicing away how to express something in a particular way; how to write a story or a thought on life.

Writing is very much like painting he would tell his grandchildren, in that you have to keep experimenting with different colours, brushes, and canvases before you find your own personal style; the style that is just right for you.

And when you have discovered your style you can then really begin to paint something beautiful; really begin to write something inspired.

Many people try to skip or avoid all the background effort required to producing a great work of art or a great book, but not him.

When he would be working on some story he would get up at four-thirty every morning, except on weekends, and he would write until noon.

Sometimes he would be writing in his dreams, and would suddenly wake up, and either he would write down the words or a sentence that he had seen in his dreams in a notebook or record them on a small handheld recorder.

Teacher, what age was grandfather Riordan when he published his first book?

You might find this hard to believe, Owen but he was sixty-two.

My Nan, Teacher says that some fruit take a long long time to ripen, so we need to be patient.

Your nan, Mary is very wise.

What was his first book about, Teacher?

It was a fabulous collection of children's stories, Martin: stories for children just about your age that could be enjoyed in any part of the world.

Oh, I would love to read them, Teacher.

Me too, Martin.

Grandmother Aine loved to see him writing for he was happiest and the most passionate about life and being alive when he was writing.

There was a glint in his eyes and upbeat in his step.

Every afternoon they would enjoy going out for a walk together.

They would always be walking arm in arm.

She would be at his left arm as she always liked being close to his heart.

They would go out for walks primarily for the good of their health, but also to meet people to have a chat or two.

They never watched or listened to the weather forecast because they always considered it to be too general.

The weather for them was what it was whenever they opened either the front or the back door.

If it was not too harsh they would go out for a walk.

And they had this interesting agreement between the two of them that they would never discuss the weather with whoever they met as they found people are always inclined to be complaining about the weather.

They discovered that it would make little or no difference what good word they gave to such people about the weather for they would always fall back to

saying something negative about it.

Teacher, my Daddy and Mammy are a bit like that.

When Daddy comes in from work, the first words out of his mouth are about the weather.

It is either too warm or too cold for him; either too wet or too dry.

There is no satisfying him, Teacher it seems.

And my Mammy does the same when she meets any of the neighbours.

Mammy and Daddy can sometimes spend up to a half an hour or more just talking about the weather before they get around to talking about anything else.

When walking they would be chatting about the flowers and the animals in the fields and the birds and the insects.

And because they moved along nice and slow, they were able to observe a lot more things than you and me.

Like for instance, a ladybird moving along a blade of grass; a honeybee sucking nectar from a flower, a butterfly warming herself in the sun, and the ants carrying loads on their backs.

In the summer time the whole afternoon could be spent on a walk for there was so much to see, hear, scent and feel.

And there were times when they walking along that they never said anything for they were enjoying just listening to each other's footsteps and breathing.

They loved as much being in the silence of each other as they did in the chatting away of each other.

They both loved stargazing and had over the years become quite knowledgeable of the starry heavens.

They knew when such and such a star and planet

was rising, and when precisely the sun would be rising over the horizon at any time of the year, and also when it would be setting.

They knew the waxing and the waning of the moon.

During their stargazing they often saw meteorite showers.

And of course they saw many satellites.

And from time to time they saw things they couldn't explain.

When they were younger they would tell people that they had seen something strange in the sky at night or in the broad daylight, but people only made them feel that they were imagining things.

So naturally enough, they gave up telling anyone about anything unusual they happened to see in the sky.

They kept it to themselves, and he sometimes would work such sightings into one of his books.

He was skillful at that kind of thing.

Teacher, one sunny evening when I was younger than I am now, I was sitting on the tree swing at home when I saw something different in the sky that I never did see before.

It was like an orange coloured cat that was falling down with his four legs stretched out on either side of him.

And there were green lights on the bottoms of his paws and one round yellow one flashing in his belly.

He was moving around in the sky like a fly does in a room.

And he looked as big as a full moon when it first gets up.

So what did you do, Tara?

I ran in, Teacher, and told my Mammy to come out and see it, but she said to me not to be bothering her because she wanted to watch the end of a daily drama on television.

Then I went back out and played on the swing again, but the

strange thing that I did see in the sky before I went in was already left for some other where.

You believe me, Teacher that I did see it, don't you?

I do indeed, Tara because I also saw strange things in the sky when I was small, and nobody would believe me either.

Our neighbour, Teacher told us that one night when he out walking his dog he saw a humongous black spaceship appear in the northern sky and that it was going towards the southern sky.

It had no lights in it whatsoever, he said, and it was so huge that it blocked out the stars in the background for about two minutes as it was slowly and silently moving along.

I believe him, Teacher because he tells no lies to us ever.

Thank you, Hugh.

And I believe him and you too.

Thank you, Teacher.

Now one cold winter's morning in the month of January, grandfather Riordan was clearing out the fireplace for the new day's fire.

Grandmother Aine was sitting on the sofa watching some tennis on television.

She loved watching either tennis or snooker, and knew all the major players in both sports, and their different styles, strengths, and weaknesses.

On this occasion she was watching the replay of a match in the Australian Open Tennis Championships which had been played during the night.

She would watch it without finding out who had already won as she wanted to enjoy the outcome for herself.

Grandfather Riordan loved to see her face as she watched the tennis.

It was as if she was a young girl who was playing the tennis herself.

Cleaning out the fireplace and setting it up for the new fire and then lighting it was something he enjoyed all his life.

He had learnt how to do it from observing his parents and grandparents.

They would always say to him that there was more to the cleaning out, the setting up, and the lighting of a fire than meets the eye.

He would feel connected to other people around the country and the world who were also cleaning out fireplaces, setting up new fires, and lighting them.

And often he would imagine too that there was some connection between him lighting the fire and the ancient peoples who had dwelt along by the shores of lakes and rivers, and even with those who had dwelt in deep caves and in high trees.

The fire in the wall opened up all such connections for him.

And for this reason it could often take him up to an hour to clean out the fireplace; to setting up the fire, and actually to lighting it because he would be pausing every now and then to think about all these connections.

Now he had almost the setting up of the fire complete, and was just about to add one more piece of turf before lighting it, when he noticed a footprint in the piece of turf.

A footprint, Teacher?

Yes, a footprint, Colin.

Of course he had to stop and examine it and think about it.

It was a fox's footprint which must have been made when the land was soggy either when the turf was being formed or while it was being harvested.

Either way the sight of the fox's footprint in it truly fascinated him.

And as was their habit, whenever they would discover something interesting, they would always share it with each other and talk about it.

So it was that he got a table serviette and wrapped it around the bottom of the piece of turf and gave it to grandmother Aine to view it for herself.

As was her style of courtesy she turned down the volume completely on the television to examine in detail the footprint in the turf, and for to make it easier for them to talk about it.

Teacher, my Daddy told me that there was a man at work with him who was always holding the television remote in his hand and tapping it on his knee when he was sitting at home watching television.

And that even when his children or wife were talking to him about anything he would only press down the volume a small bit, and that he would be forever casting an eye over towards the screen and flicking up and down through the channels.

My Daddy told him that wasn't a very polite or wise thing to be doing so he stopped doing it.

Well done to your, daddy, Finbarr for giving him the good word.

Thank you, Teacher.

So grandmother Aine wondered too when and how the fox's footprint had come to be in the piece of turf.

And they enjoyed having a conversation about it.

Now as she was about to give it back to him, she

happened to turn it over to have one a look at the back of it when she noticed something shinny partially sticking out of it.

She gently and slowly pealed back bits of turf, and to their great surprise the more of it she peeled back the more something interesting was being revealed.

There was a lump of something in the turf.

It wasn't nicely shaped but rather looked just like a blob.

And then they recognized and knew what it was; yes, it was a lump of gold!

Wow!

While grandmother Aine carefully removed the lump of gold from the turf and took it into the kitchen to clean it, grandfather Riordan took the piece of turf and placed it up in a shelf among ornaments with the fox's footprint showing.

And he then when and knelt in front of the fireplace and lit the fire.

There he remained watching it grow in glow.

He then went and washed his hands and he and grandmother Aine sat together on the sofa to examine the wondrous find which had come to their hands.

They used a magnified glass to look at it in more detail, but beyond that they had no idea how pure it was or how valuable it might be.

After chatting about it for some time they decided to place it on the mantelpiece over the fire where they could be looking at it from time to time along with the other little items they had up there.

Sometime they would take it to a jeweller friend of theirs in the city to show it to him and tell him how they

had found it.

As they always had enjoyed living within their means they always had enough of everything for their life.

For themselves they didn't need more money.

They used always say that their riches were to be found in the happiness of having each other: in being healthy with bright minds, and in having healthy happy bright children; healthy happy bright sons and daughters-in-laws, grandchildren and greatgrandchildren.

But they said that if the gold find was worth something they would sell it and do something nice for the family and others with the money they got for it.

Three weeks later, when they were of a mind to travel to the city to celebrate one of their monthly reminders of their wedding day, they took the lump of gold along with them.

Grandfather Riordan had removed it from its place on the mantelpiece and given it to grandmother Aine who wrapped it in a table serviette and placed it in her handbag.

They used travel by bus to the city.

They could just sit back and enjoy the lovely scenery along the way.

When they were younger they used love to drive themselves, but now they preferred someone else did the driving for them.

After enjoying a lovely lunch in one of their favourite restaurants in the city, they strolled just around the corner to drop in to see an old friend of theirs who owned a very pretty jewellery shop.

It seems he was the fifth generation of jewellers in the family to own the same shop.

With meeting him they were very happy, and they enjoyed listening to stories about each other's families.

And with finding everybody to be in good health and doing well for themselves, they showed him the lump of gold, and told him the story of how it had come into their hands.

He was very much like them personality wise, in that he would never get overly excited about anything, but this excited him for he had never seen the likes of it before.

After turning it this way and that way under a special microscope and doing some tests on it he gave his verdict that it was indeed gold; but not just gold, but gold of the purest quality.

As their friendship was more important to them than anything, neither the jeweller nor grandmother Aine or grandfather Riordan brought up its value in money terms.

And so it was that a large sum of money came into their hands in the form of a cheque, and a lump of purist gold for the jeweller.

And the three of them went to a nearby cafe for some tea and freshly baked scones in order to continue chatting away some more about their families and life in general.

Before leaving the city they lodged the money in the bank.

They then enjoyed doing some strolling along the main street before returning home by bus.

On their way home they were very silent; just thinking away about things, and who they would help with the money they had received.

They didn't have to ask each other what they were

thinking, they knew.

Most people when they suddenly receive a large sum of money, such as through the lottery, immediately tell the whole world that they have won it.

They spend without giving little or no thought to what they are doing.

They buy perhaps a big house or a big car or even a few cars and a number of houses.

They travel here and there, and eat and drink the most expensive food and wine.

And they buy everything for their children, relatives and friends.

They spend and spend until before they know it they have almost nothing left.

Teacher, my Mammy told us about a man she had read about in a magazine who lived somewhere up the country and who used love to drink and was always half drunk even in the middle of the day.

And then, how that one day, didn't he win the lotto and instead of doing something good with the money he bought himself a bottle mountain of whiskeys, vodkas, wines, beers, and porters.

And that every day he would sit at the bottom of that mountain and drink away until he could drink no more.

Then one weekend wasn't he found dead to the world sitting at the bottom of that mountain with half a bottle whiskey in one hand and porter in the other.

The poor man.

Thank you for sharing it with us, Gerard.

You are welcome, Teacher.

My Daddy said, Teacher that if he and Mammy ever won some money they would never tell us but would surprise us by taking us on a holiday to Spain or to some other nice place.

You have a great, daddy and mammy, Emily.

I have, Teacher.

If I won money, Teacher I would put it all in the bank and keep it there until I be big.

And then it would have made a lot of interest too by that time.

Wouldn't you share any of it before then with your parents, brothers or sisters, Thomas?

I suppose I would some bit all right, Teacher.

Proud of you, Thomas.

Now, grandmother Aine and grandfather Riordan as I have mentioned already were never the rushing kind.

They would always take their time doing anything.

And so they took their time to do something with the money they had received for the gold.

The one thing they didn't do however was to tell anyone that they had come by a large some of money having sold a lump of gold they had found in a piece of turf.

They didn't even tell their own children about it.

But of course they did tell them about finding the fox's footprint in the turf.

But to be sure they gave them a big help with any mortgages they may have had on their houses; always telling them that they had come into a small bit of money.

Why, Teacher didn't they buy brand new houses for them, and cars and things like that?

They didn't want to interrupt their life, Aoife.

Life is all about striving after something and making it happen either on your own or with someone else such as your wife or husband.

Everybody must have dreams and be allowed the

opportunity to make for themselves those dreams come true.

I like that idea, Teacher; I like living with hope.

Hope, Students is one of the things that makes a new day so interesting.

For a long time grandmother Aine and grandfather Riordan had noticed, and it had always bothered them, that the children and young people in the village where they lived had really no nice recreation centre.

So, secretly they put a good sum of the money towards the construction and maintenance of a beautiful multipurpose recreation centre.

They enjoyed secretly giving money to local sports teams.

And they especially helped fund very expensive medical needs for very sick people all over the country.

They would also, when they were out for a walk, slip an envelope with some money in it through the letterbox of someone or some family's door that they felt were in great need of it.

If ever asked they would say someone on high needed for it to be done.

And they would never sign their names to such gifts as they wanted them to be anonymous.

There were so many people they enjoyed secretly helping that without people knowing it life became very happy for people not alone in the village about but also in many other parts of the country.

When all the gold money was gone they didn't feel sad or anything like that.

They were just very grateful that they could have the opportunity to secretly do good for so many people.

And they continued with doing the things that they always loved doing together.

And with that their days and nights were ever lovely.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents, and grandparents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

9

SEA OF KNOWLEDGE

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about the
Wonderful Person Credited with the
Building of our Precious School.

To the left of the main door into the school building we see a stone very low in the wall on which is engraved in old style Gaelge these words:

**Bunscoil Chaitliceach FARRAIGE NA GAILÍLEB
a é an tAthair Peadar Ó Grianáin a bheannaigh agus
a leag an chloch bhoinn seo ag fáinniú an
Chéadaoin ar an 15ú Feabhra 1727.**

Lúcáis 5:1-11.

What might this be in English?

Catholic Primary School, SEA OF GALILEE.

*It was Father Peter O'Greenane who blessed and laid this
foundation stone at the dawning of Wednesday the 15th February
1727.*

Luke 5: 1-11

Excellent, one and all.

And what is Saint Luke telling us in his gospel in
Chapter 5:1-11?

*He is telling us, Teacher of a great catch of fish the fishermen
had in the Sea of Galilee when they had Jesus with them in the boat.*

Indeed, he is, Natalia.

Very nicely put.

Thank you, Teacher.

It seems that Fr. O'Greenane was very much
enchanted, inspired and encouraged by this particular

story.

He must have had some kind of vision of a school being a place like a sea of knowledge where a great amount of ideas could be caught, if, we but put our trust in God, our teachers and parents to show us where they are to be found.

Fr. O'Greenane, Teacher had a very nice mind.

He sure had, Owen.

This stone; this foundation stone was not always visible as it is now.

In fact it remained out of sight for one hundred years from the time it had been laid and blessed.

It only saw daylight on that first morning in 1727 before it was quickly covered over.

But we will come back to the reason for that later. Jumping ahead to the year 1827.

On the Thursday evening of the 15th February of that year the parish priest's seventy-nine year-old housekeeper went to bed about 9 o'clock as she usually did.

No sooner had she fallen asleep than she found herself to be in a dream; a most unusual dream.

In the dream she was standing by our school.

And as she was standing there a beautiful snow white Irish wolfhound appeared out of a nearby wood, and he came along by the school wall, and just to the left of the main door.

There he excitedly started digging a hole in the ground with his great paws.

The woman watched and thought to herself that the wolfhound must have buried a bone there at one time and had returned to dig it up.

But the more she watched the more she noticed that he had dug a hole so deep that he was now fully inside it himself, and he was still digging away.

She thought this was wondrous strange indeed for a dog would never bury a bone that deep.

And as she began to move a little closer to see better, didn't the wolfhound suddenly disappear into thin air.

She thought to herself that she should cover in the hole in case anyone might fall into it.

And as she was down on her knees and about to push in some soil and stones, she noticed at the bottom of the hole a few letters of writing on one of the stones in the wall, but she could not read it clearly.

She slid down into the hole which when she stood up in it was almost five feet deep.

She was about to remove some more of the soil and stones from in front of the stone, to try and get a better look at what was engraved there, when she woke from out of her dream; out of her sleep.

At breakfast that morning she told her unusual dream to the parish priest.

He was fascinated by it and wondered could there be anything to it.

So that very afternoon, with curiosity getting the better of him, he visited the school and mentioned his housekeeper's dream to the principal.

He too was fascinated by it.

On the Saturday morning of that same week both he, the parish priest, and the priest's housekeeper came to the school with two shovels and a pickaxe and they started to dig a hole in by the wall in the exact same spot

where the wolfhound in the dream had dug it.

After some time they had dug a hole almost a yard deep.

It wasn't easy digging at all as there were lots of stones mixed in with the soil, and besides the ground was a little bit frozen too.

The priest and the principal were beginning to suggest that maybe they should consider giving up, for after all it was only a dream, but the housekeeper encouraged them to dig a little more because she said the hole in the dream was almost as high as herself when she was standing in it.

And so they continued digging on for another bit, and then to their amazement, yet also somewhat to their expectation, didn't they unearth the foundation stone.

It hadn't seen the light of day since Wednesday the 15th February 1727.

That is for one hundred years it was covered over.

And they wondered why it was buried so as foundation stones are always meant to be seen.

The principal told the priest and the housekeeper that he had often asked himself why there wasn't a foundation stone to be seen anywhere in the building.

He never considered for a moment though that it could be located low down in the wall and even buried.

Now we know from the stone itself and from our local history that the school was the inspiration of a priest named Peter O'Greenane who was devoted in his efforts to having a place where Catholic children in the area could be taught.

At the time, and for miles in any direction, there was no such Catholic school.

There have been a number of very dark times in the long history of our country, and this certainly was one of them, in that Catholics were being greatly persecuted.

This was a period of religious suppression which we are all well familiar with from our history lessons.

Historians call it the Penal Times, and Fr. O'Greenane lived during part of that dreadful time.

Teacher, I remember when I first saw those two words in a book, I thought it meant that it was a time of many pens; that there were many people writing during those times.

Words are interesting, Sophie aren't they?

They are, Teacher.

They are like a sandwich in that they have differ layers of meanings and flavours.

A wonderful insight, Sophie.

Not at all Teacher.

It was just my mind helping me out.

But now I want to tell you something which does not appear in the history books; something which has been handed down through the years from one storyteller to another concerning good Fr. Peter O'Greenane.

Teacher, why doesn't history record everything so that we can about everything know all the better?

It would be nice all right, Gerard if it did, but in practical terms it would be something very difficult to do as there are always so many things happening all at the same time.

I guesst the historians who are recording the events for us have to decide which events would be more important and more useful for future generations.

The only problem with that is that it depends on who is writing the history.

Not everyone agrees about what is important and what is useful.

And for this reason, when we study any historical event, we need to try and search for as many versions of it as possible, so that we can make up our own minds on it. Peter O'Greenane was born over the hills and faraway to the southwest of us in the year 1677.

His family were very poor.

Often they would have only one meal a day, and that consisted of nothing at all that was in any way very nutritious.

It was just enough to keep them alive.

The family lived in a thatched roofed stone building that had only two spaces in it and a loft.

The main space was where they had an open fire and where all the cooking and the boiling of water was done, and it also had in it a table and some makeshift chairs.

In a small loft over the fireplace was where he and his brothers and sisters slept.

A curtain on a homemade string divided the space; one side for the girls and the other for the boys.

The other room was where their parents slept.

They always had one cow, but they owned no land, and so it was the job of the children to mind her along the lanes as she fed of the grass.

This was a job that Peter liked doing as there was plenty and plenty of time to sit down and think about things, and to look about at nature whether it was in the valleys or in the sky.

He would often be talking away to the cow, and the cow would let him talk away while she contentedly grazed

or was chewing the cud.

His home was a place of storytelling, and his parents had told him and his siblings many stories from the Bible; many stories in particular from the gospels, and he was enchanted by all of them.

These stories were from faraway places over the hills and waves; places with poetic and lovely sounding names such as Bethlehem Ephrathah, Sea of Galilee, Capernaum, Bethany, Emmaus, Judaea and Samaria.

He knew many of them off by heart and could in his own way visualize what they looked like.

He imagined Jesus must have been very much like his father as his father's ways were always good in that he was a very honest, sincere, joyful person who was always aware that God very much loved him and his family.

And he imagined Jesus's mother Mary must have been very much like his own mother in the beautiful, bright and joyful way in which she lived her life.

And just like her husband she was always aware that God very much loved her and her family.

And he imagined he and his brothers and sisters to be as were the children spoken of in the gospels; ever happy children even though life could oft times be difficult and frightening.

And it was for this reason that he felt very familiar with the characters in the gospels.

And about God he had very warm feelings in his heart; he knew God to be always and everywhere taking the very best of care of him and his family, in spite of them being unbelievably poor.

They had a family saying, something like, that whether they had nothing or whether they had plenty,

they must always be thankful to God.

And not just to be thankful, but to let that feeling of being always and everywhere thankful make them ever joyful.

To be a child like the children and the grown ups in the gospels was to be joyful.

And he knew his parents always to be full of gratitude and joy.

Sometimes, Teacher I feel I am brimming over with gratitude and joy, and I don't know the reason why.

When we are always mindful that God is always and everywhere taking the very best of care of us, Amy, then we naturally have such sudden feelings of gratitude and joy well up within us, just like a refreshing spring suddenly bursting forth in a hill slope on a warm summer's day.

That is exactly it, Teacher.

Of a grand day, early in the month of May, when Peter was minding the cow along a nearby lane, he felt the urge to look up and he saw the sun shinning down on him through a blossoming hawthorn tree.

This beautiful scene, he had seen many times, but for some reason on this particular occasion, it seemed to be as if it were communicating with him.

Was the sun talking to him, Teacher?

No, not talking to him in the way we are talking to each other now, Patrick.

It was not talking to his ears but more to his heart, and not to his heart alone but to his entire body.

From head to toe he could feel that the sun or that someone was talking to him through the sun shinning through the white to pinkish blush flowers of the tree.

What did the sun say to him, Teacher?

It was rather, Niamh that it let him to feel, that God wanted him to do something special with his life.

And that something special was for him to become a priest.

At the time in which he lived he couldn't have been asked to live a more dangerous life.

Why so, Teacher?

At that time, Brian priests were being persecuted, which means that their life was being made very difficult for them by certain people.

They had to hide in the valleys, woods and hills, and in caves along by the seashore, and could only say mass secretly.

There were people who were paid to hunt for them and to murder them.

It was a most frightful time to be a priest in Ireland.
Oh.

He didn't tell his parents for a few days about his experience with the sun shinning through the tree for he imagined they would not welcome the idea of him becoming a priest.

After all he was their eldest child and as such was expected to help them in the taking care of the family.

But he had misread his parents for they showed no objection whatsoever to him becoming a priest as they very much trusted in God.

They were of the view, that if God wanted their son to be a priest, it was totally acceptable by them.

God's ways are God's ways was what they used always be teaching their children.

The only problem was they had no idea how this was going to happen for they were as poor as poor could

almost be, and they were uneducated in school knowledge.

Nevertheless, they were willing to fully trust God, in that a way would make itself possible for their Peter to become a priest.

It is so God, Teacher, isn't it?

How so, Emily?

Well, asking for the impossible, Teacher out of the possible.

Never a truer word spoken, Emily.

Then it must have been God speaking, Teacher because it would have been impossible for me to think of that myself.

Of a day, an old man happened to be coming along the lane by Peter's house, and he stopped and said to his parents, that in a dream he was told to go to a certain thatched roofed stone house, and that there he would discover a boy who was destined to become a voice and a presence of God on the island and in the world, and that he himself was to make it possible for him to receive an education in order to become a priest.

And so it was that secretly Peter was given lessons on the contents of certain holy books and on the wisdom of Jesus.

Now, as it was quite impossible for him to study in Ireland all the subjects that he would need to learn in order to become a priest, it was necessary that he should be smuggled abroad to continue his studies.

When he was seventeen, he secretly boarded a boat bound for Spain.

He was seasick all the way there.

And not alone that, but just off the coast of Spain the boat hit a rock and he was cast into the waves.

Although he could swim he had no energy left in

him from being so sick on board.

And so he started to sink down and down into the deep waters.

And as he was helplessly sinking something or someone seemed to be rescuing him.

Before he knew it wasn't he grasping on to a piece of wood from the starboard side of the broken boat.

After a night and day of being pushed this way and that by the waves, he was eventually tossed up on to a beach where he was found by some local village people who helped him to recover from his frightening ordeal.

And although they couldn't speak a word of each other's language, they managed to get on very well through the use of some hand signs and facial gestures.

Teacher, I can do some sign language.

This is 'Sea of Galilee' in visual language.

That is a marvellous skill to have, Ciaran.

Where did you learn it?

From my Uncle, Teacher.

He teaches Irish Sign Language in a school for people who can't hear nothing.

Wonderful.

Let us all be ever-thankful for our gifts of sight and hearing, and for the ability to be able to speak, and to be able to walk, run, jump and climb.

We are always inclined to be forgetting our many blessings, Teacher, aren't we?

Maybe not always, Finbarr, but definitely sometimes we do.

Now, ten days after his arrival the people of the village took Peter deep into the mountains to meet a priest.

It so happened that the priest they took him to meet was also originally from Ireland.

He had fled the island because it was no longer safe for him to be there, and he had decided to stay on in Spain for the time being with the hope that it would soon be safe enough for him to return to Ireland.

Peter was very happy to meet a person from his native land, and doubly glad he was to learn that he was a priest.

And he told him how he had felt called to be a priest, and had come to Spain to study to become one.

Having heard his story, and realising his sincerity and strong faith, the priest decided that he would take Peter to a place where he could study in peace.

And the place he took him to was called Salamanca which is situated in the countryside to the west of the great city of Madrid.

There he studied Spanish, Latin and Greek, and philosophy and theology for the next nine years.

And in 1703, at the age of twenty-six he was ordained a priest.

He was delighted.

While he had been studying there in Salamanca, he was all the time in the back of his mind thinking of Ireland, for he felt certain that he was meant to be a priest there.

Many of the head priests in the college where he studied tried to persuade him not to return to Ireland, because they said it had become a very dangerous place to be a priest.

They tried to advise him to stay on because they had discovered he was quite brilliant at his studies and had a

natural flare for teaching.

They wanted him to stay on to be a teacher of future priests.

But all their encouraging words and suggestions weren't having any hold on him, for he knew in his heart that he wanted to return to Ireland as he felt there was a greater need there for him than in any other place.

I told earlier how he had great difficulty coming to Spain in that he found himself in a shipwreck and was washed ashore.

Well on his way back to Ireland, it was as if there was some invisible force; someone trying to prevent him from getting back, for on the way to the harbour to board a boat for Ireland, a big tree suddenly and seemingly of its own accord fell right across the path in front of him.

Another bit along the way, this big black puck goat; a goat as big as a donkey madly chased him.

He was running and running trying to get away from the goat when he tripped and went tumbling down the side of a hill.

Though unhurt he lay still there at the bottom.

Seeing this, the big black donkey of a goat couldn't be bothered following him down, and so walked off.

When he was nearing the harbour this very beautiful woman all fully dressed in nothing but the morning sunshine and whose long auburn hair was waving away in the wind came strolling towards him and with teasing words and motions was trying to divert him.

She was offering him a life most pleasurable with her there in Spain, if, he would but stay and give up his way.

He however didn't allow himself to be tempted by

her but kept on making for the harbour and the boat.

Now on the boat journey back to Ireland, a flock of strange birds suddenly came swooping down out of dark grey rainclouds, and were circling and circling above and about the boat.

And they were screeching and yelling so much that it was all but deafening.

They even tried to attack the boat itself by pecking at the wood of the mast with their beaks, and tearing at the sails with their claws.

The crew quickly however lowered the sails and beat them off.

The strange birds just as suddenly as they had swooped down on the boat soared back up into the dark grey rainclouds and were not seen again.

Oh that was very scary, Teacher.

It was, Ciara.

Teacher?

Yes, Ciara?

Teacher, my Daddy once told us a story about a cantankerous begrudging old man who had little or no love for all animals.

One rainy day in late spring he was annoyed by the talking of crows high up in the trees as they were happily taking care of their babies in their nests.

So what do think he did?

What did he do, Ciara?

Well he went into his house, Teacher and brought out his double-barrelled shotgun and shot up into the homes of the birds in the trees.

The mother and father crows became so upset and angry that he had shot up at them and their young families that they all joined together and swooped down to attack him.

*He just managed to make it inside the door of his house.
But did that stop them?*

No, it didn't.

*They all flew up on to the roof of his house, so they did, and
pecked and scratched every last slate off of it.*

*And the rain came falling in and was drenching his whole
house.*

That was even more of a scary story, Ciara.

*I know; I know it was, Teacher but it just came out to the
front of my head as I was listening to you tell how the birds were
attaching the mast and the sails on the boat carrying Fr.*

O'Greenane back here to Ireland.

You told it very well, Ciara so you did.

Thank you.

You are welcome, Teacher.

*Ciara, did any of the crows or their families get hurt when he
shot up at them?*

*I asked my Daddy that question too, Sean, but he said he
didn't know if they did or they didn't.*

*Now, of a lovely warm July morning, in that same
year: the year of 1703, the southern coastline of Ireland
came into clear view, and Fr. O'Greenane's eyes welled up
with tears to be again seeing his beloved lovely native isle.*

It had been nine years since he had left its shores.

*I remember, Teacher when our family were returning on the
ferry from holidays in France, and when we first saw the coast of
Ireland, we all cheered.*

*And my Daddy said, there is no lovelier place in the whole
wide world than your own native place.*

And we all agreed and cheered at his lovely words.

Even other passengers beside us did the same.

I well know that lovely feeling, Tara.

And what happened next, Teacher?

All that day, Tara and the next they sailed up the west coast of Ireland; always staying a good distance out from the land.

And it was only after sunset that they ventured closer because they were afraid that priest-hunters would discover they were carrying a priest on board.

If they were found to be doing so they would most definitely have lost their lives.

And so, under the cover of darkness, they put Fr. O'Greenane ashore in a small secluded bay, and they then sailed back down the coast and docked in their usual southern port as if they had only just arrived directly from Spain.

Over the next few days and nights, Fr. O'Greenane carefully made his way inland; making sure he wouldn't be seen by anyone.

He would eat nothing but the berries he found along the way and drank but of the mountain streams.

From time to time he could see a village or a town in the distance, but he wouldn't dare to venture too near to them in case he would be caught by those who would only want to do him great harm.

He had to disguise himself as best he could.

He didn't wear any priestly clothes.

He had let his hair and beard grow longer.

Days went by and still he hadn't dared to venture too close to villages or towns.

Then, of afternoon as he was sitting and watching a heron standing on the bank of a river, he heard the sounds of some men laughing.

With the sound the heron immediately rose and flew

away.

Fr. O'Greenane hid himself in some bushes from where he watched as a group of straggly dressed soldiers came trudging along on the other side of the river.

They appeared to be half drunk.

In the middle of them he noticed a man who was all tied up in ropes, and they were dragging him and kicking him along.

Every few steps he would fall and the soldiers would kick him or hit him and tell him to get up and to keep on walking.

And they were mocking him and telling him that soon they were going to make it so that he would no longer be of this world.

You mean, Teacher they were going to kill him?

Yes they were, Ciara.

Oh.

Fr. O'Greenane knew the man to be a priest by what the soldiers were saying about him, and his heart ached to see a fellow human being; to see a fellow priest being thus humiliated.

He was almost tempted to shout across the river at them but something within him told him to hold his anger; to be still and to remain quiet.

Of a day he arrived in the vicinity of where he was born, and he carefully followed along the once lovely lane where he used to tend the cow when he was small.

He came to the place where the sun had shone through the hawthorn tree telling him to become a priest.

And the sun again was shining through that same tree.

He felt his courage being strengthened, and a new

sense of hope and determination filled him.

He tried to get close to the family home but he discovered to his shock the thatch on it was almost all burnt and rotten and two of the walls looked as if they had been deliberately knocked.

He made out it wasn't wind or rain that had knocked them.

He could see no one had been living there for quite some time.

And he remained there crying and remembering his parents and brothers and sisters, and wondering what might have become of them.

Then he noticed a little ways over from the house what looked like two graves marked by two wooden crosses.

Someone had scratched on the wooden crosses the names of those who were buried therein.

To his utter shock and heartbreak, he could learn from what was written there on the crosses, that his entire family had been murdered and buried there beside the house.

He nearly lost his mind with reading the inscription, and could hardly stop himself from crying and crying.

And it had also mentioned that they had been murdered because it was known that they had a priest in the family.

These words all but broke his heart.

Teacher?

Yes, Sophie?

Why did God, do you think, Teacher need to have such a good family be murdered?

Honestly, Sophie I don't know the why.

All I know is that while by faith, hope and love we have to accept God's ways as being God's ways, we also have to accept we will not know the why.

I find it always very helpful to keep in mind that God always knows the bigger picture whereas we don't.

Thank you, Teacher.

That is very helpful.

You are welcome, Sophie.

After several hours, Fr. O'Greenane pulled himself together, and said mass there in memory of his family before he left from that sad place, and went deep into the hills.

He knew he had wanted to be a priest; he knew he had wanted to be priest back in Ireland, but now that he was here he didn't know what he should do, for if he were to reveal himself that would be the end of him; he would end up like his family.

For the rest of his life he was to live in seclusion in the woods and valleys and hills and caves up and down the country.

For the rest of his life, Teacher?

Yes, Hugh.

Those were the terrible times in which Fr. O'Greenane and his fellow priests lived.

On occasion, he hid for short periods on some of the islands off the coast such as Rathlin, Arranmore, Achill, Inishmore, Great Blasket, Valentia, and Bere.

He even spent some time in hiding on the Scottish isle of Islay.

In which part of Scotland is Islay located, anyone?

Teacher?

Yes, Colin?

It is on the west side of Scotland, Teacher, and is one of the Inner Hebrides.

Well done, Colin.

Every year, Teacher my family visits Edinburgh.

It's a lovely place.

It is indeed, Colin.

I greatly like visiting Scotland.

From time to time, Fr. O'Greenane would meet village people and townspeople who would protect him and give him some food and lodgings.

In return he would say mass for them in a grove or in a cave by the seashore.

He would also perform baptisms and weddings, and even funerals.

He had however to be extremely careful as not everyone was to be trusted.

Some people were known as informants, and what they would do is they would notify priests-hunters if they knew a priest was in the area.

He could never stay more than a night in any one place.

There were priest-hunters everywhere or priest-catchers as they used to be called.

Some of them were well-known and had become famous for the number of priests they had hunted down and caught, and had received large sums of money as a reward for their efforts.

Teacher, what would happen to any priest who was caught?

They were first very badly mistreated, Anthony, and nearly all of them would be deprived of their lives.

Oh.

Several times, while hiding in the woods and valleys

and hills and along by the seashore he came very close to being caught by these desperate people.

On three occasions in particular it was almost the end for him.

Do you want to hear about them?

Oh, yes, Teacher we do.

Please tell us.

We have to know.

Okay, then.

Well, the first time was when he was trying of a day to make his way through some briary undergrowth.

Suddenly, and from out of nowhere, this man on horseback came galloping along and he was cracking a long whip in every direction and crazily shouting in English, I caught me one; I caught me one!

He was dragging along on a rope after him something that was being very roughly tossed this way and that way through the briary undergrowth.

Fr. O'Greenane tried to get out of his way, but as he was doing so, the rider cracked his whip and struck his back from his right shoulder and down across to his waist; ripping his coat and knocking him to the ground in the process.

Was his back cut, Teacher?

Fortunately it wasn't, Emily as he was wearing a heavy shirt underneath his coat.

Teacher, could Fr. O'Greenane see what the man was dragging after him?

No he couldn't, Cormac as he didn't dare to stand up.

Only after the man's crazy shouts had faded off in the distance did he get up, and then he quickly

disappeared into a nearby wood.

And the second time, Teacher?

The second time he came very close to being caught by these desperate people was, Jennie when he had disguised himself as a shepherd to attend the funeral of a priest who had been murdered by one of these priest-hunters.

He was walking along with the local people behind the coffin which was being carried in a horse drawn cart, when the man who was walking next to him on his left, and who was dressed in the disguise of a farmer, but who wasn't a priest, suddenly half stumbled over himself and half fell in against Fr. O'Greenane.

Without even saying as much as an, I am sorry, didn't he instead hit Fr. O'Greenane a belt of his fist on the shoulder and said to him in Gaeilge, If you were a priest you would be going into the very same hole as that fellow there in the coffin for trying to trip me up.

Fr. O'Greenane didn't hit him back nor did he reply to him.

Instead, he just continued on walking with the crowd.

Teacher, Fr. O'Greenane must have disguised himself very well to say that the priest-hunter wasn't able to recognise that he was a priest dressed up as a shepherd.

He had had plenty of practice, Mary at dressing up in many different disguises.

It was the only way he could appear in public whenever he needed to, such as when attending a fellow priest's funeral.

Little did the priest-hunter realise though that the man who was walking along on his own left was also a

priest in disguise.

What was he disguised as, Teacher?

A drooped old woman, Martin for he was an elderly priest.

Both priests were very brave, Teacher, weren't they?

They were indeed, Laura.

But the thing about it was that neither of them realized that he was a priest-hunter for he too had also very well disguised himself.

It was only at the actual burial that they realised he had been walking along between them; walking along and pretending to be very sad over the death of the priest.

He was pretending to be praying on a long rosary beads which he was clutching in his two hands.

And every few steps along the way, he would look up to sky and ask God, why He had to let such a good priest die in his prime.

As the coffin was being lowered into the ground the priest-hunter was gaping around this way and that to see if he could detect if there were any priests in the crowd.

If there were he would have had them arrested.

One young woman who was standing right behind the two disguised priests whispered in their ears that they better get out of there as quickly and as quietly as possible, for she said, the man who was gaping around was a priest-hunter, and could well possibly be the murderer of the priest that was being buried.

Fr. O'Greenane, and the other priest were greatly shocked to learn this and to see that he was the very same man who had been walking between them behind the coffin; the same man who was pretending to be very sad over the death of the priest; who was pretending to be

praying and who every few steps along the way would look up to sky and ask God why He had to let such a good priest die in his prime; the same man who had half stumbled over himself and half fell in against Fr.

O'Greenane, and who had hit him with his fist on the shoulder and who had said threatening words to him.

With the help of that young woman they managed to escape into the hills.

She was very brave, Teacher wasn't she?

She was indeed, Thomas.

There were many such brave people both young and old who risked their lives to help the priests.

Teacher, God must have always been minding Fr.

O'Greenane, mustn't He?

Surely, He must have been, Aoife.

Teacher; Teacher, why didn't the young woman shout out that the man was a priest-hunter so that the crowd could grab him and take him away?

If she had shouted that out Natasha, it would rather be she and the people who would have been arrested.

These were not safe times for any Catholic.

And the third time, Teacher?

The third time he came very close to being caught by these desperate people was, Owen when he was saying mass in a grove together with a bishop, who like himself was also living in seclusion.

It was Easter Sunday.

And when he was about to place the Holy Communion on the tongue of one of the men who had come up to receive Communion, didn't that person suddenly grab him by the throat with his right hand, and was shouting something at him in Spanish.

But just as he did so, didn't the bishop, who was standing on Fr. O'Greenane's right, draw a fist and hit that man an almighty belt in his left eye which knocked him to the ground.

Yeah!

In a commotion and confusion deliberately created by the other people there, Fr. O'Greenane and the bishop managed to safely escape.

Teacher, why did the man shout in Spanish at Fr. O'Greenane?

He was Spaniard who had come over to Ireland, Thomas, to hunt priests.

Teacher, we live in good times, don't we?

We do, Tara.

Of a mid August afternoon, Fr. O'Greenane was feeling quite exhausted, so he lay down to take a rest in the shade of a magnificent hazel tree that was abundant with hazelnuts.

He fell into a deep sleep, and while sleeping he had an unusual dream.

In the dream he saw two children; a girl and a boy walking towards him.

He had never before seen them, and they spoke to him in Gaeilge saying, Be not afraid; build a school for the persecuted children of these hills and valleys.

When he awoke from his dream he knew in his heart that the words spoken to him were genuine, and that he should straightaway act on them.

He set out to find a secluded place in which he could build such a school.

And of a morning in September, he knew he had found the perfect spot.

He would build it from east to west so that the sun would be shining in the windows at any time of the year.

There was a gushing stream nearby, and the wind he felt would be very kind to that place.

The first thing he done was to thank God for bringing him safely to such a lovely place.

But in his prayer he also told God that he had no idea whatsoever how to build a building; that he only knew how to write sermons, poems, and books.

An assurance however came to him in his prayers telling him that everything would be accordingly, and that a beautiful school would be built in that place.

The next day he was walking with confidence along near the spot where that gushing stream was coming out of the side of a hill, when he saw partially sticking out of the ground this very nice rectangular shaped stone.

It looked as if it had once been part of something.

With a small piece of flat stone he managed to fold back a thick layer of moss matted grass that had been covering it.

When he examined it he knew it would be the first stone that would be used to build the school.

It would be the cornerstone; the stone that would form the base of the first a corner of the building joining two walls.

He could recognise from all the smashed up stones strewn about it that it had once been the base for a Celtic High Cross; a cross that must have stood around nine feet in its day.

How come it was in pieces, Teacher because they were very well made, weren't they, and meant to last for the longest time?

Even if a tree in a storm knocked them over they wouldn't be

smashed up like that, only they'd be broken.

And they could be put back together again.

Very good, Finbarr.

You are right; they were very well made and meant to last for the longest time, but it seems that this one was deliberately smashed as there were many sledgehammer marks on the scattered stones.

Only the base stone was intact.

And he managed to carefully roll it all the way back to the secluded spot.

It took him the best part of five days to roll it as he wanted to make sure that he wouldn't cause any cracks in it.

And besides, there was no way he could lift it, for it was very heavy.

That night he fell asleep by the stone in the secluded spot but before falling asleep he was rather anxious.

Why so, Teacher?

He realised, David that seeing it took him five days to roll just one stone to the spot it would take him a few years to roll all the stones necessary to build just the walls of the school.

And also seeing that he wasn't very strong how was he going to lift all the stones by himself up to build the walls.

All these concerns accompanied him into his sleep; into his dreams.

The next morning when he woke up he was suddenly frozen with fear, and then greatly surprised to see a bunch of men and women with shovels, pickaxes and other building implements standing around him and looking down at him.

He had thought for a moment that he had been caught by informants, but to his great delight he discovered that they were people who had been called in dreams of their own to come and help him build a school for the children of the area.

The first work carried out was the laying of the cornerstone which Fr. O'Greenane had rolled all the way from the head of the stream.

A few weeks later, and after several more stones had been laid, a foundation stone was blessed and embed in the wall to the left of where the main door was going to be.

But no sooner had they it laid than they immediately covered it over with some soil and stones in case anyone might discover what was engraved on it.

**Bunscoil Chaitliceach FARRAIGE NA GAILÍLEB
a é an tAthair Peadar Ó Grianáin a bheannaigh agus
a leag an chloch bhoinn seo ag fáinniú an
Chéadaoin ar an 15ú Feabhra 1727.**

Lúcáis 5:1-11.

For the next three years the people daily came Monday to Saturday to help Fr. O'Greenane secretly build the beautiful school that we have to this day.

And to make absolutely sure that the foundation stone wouldn't be seen they filled in soil and stones to a depth of six feet all around the walls of the school.

They reasoned that a time of peace would come sometime in the future; a time when the persecution of Catholics and their priests would be over, and that then the foundation stone could be revealed for all to see and admire.

The school was blessed and opened by Fr.
O'Greenane on Monday, the 7th September 1730.

It was a very happy day for him as well as for
everyone involved, and especially it was a very happy day
for the children.

They had a school.

*How many students, Teacher were attending school on that
first day?*

There were twenty-nine, Julia.

Fourteen girls and fifteen boys.

Oh, Teacher!

That is the exact same number as is here in our classroom.

So it is, Julia.

An amazing coincidence, isn't it?

History is a funny thing, Teacher, I think.

It has at times that way about it all right, Julia.

Before Fr. O'Greenane left that day he did one
more thing.

He planted a hawthorn tree at one side of the
entrance to the school and a hazel at the other.

And look as you can see there; these same two trees
are still growing healthy and strong.

Fr. O'Greenane returned back into the hills and
valleys and to the caves along the seashore as it was safer
there for him.

Unfortunately, the following spring he passed away.

Oh, how sad, Teacher.

It seems he had peacefully passed away in his sleep
underneath a lovely moonlit starry sky.

Who had found him, Teacher?

A shepherd, Heather.

His body was brought down from the hills, and he

was buried in the old graveyard over the way in an unmarked grave so that his identity could be kept secret.

His memory though was kept alive by the local people.

And it was not until several decades later that a headstone was erected at his grave.

It was a beautiful stone Celtic cross.

On it were engraved these words in old style Gaeilge:

An tAthair Peadar Ó Grianáin 1677-1731
Ba é an té a thóg Bunscoil Chaitliceach
FARRAIGE NA GAILÍLE i 1727-1730
Sé an Tiarna mo Iascaire.

What might this be in English?

Father Peter O'Greenane 1677-1731

It was he who built the Catholic Primary School

SEA OF GALILEE in 1727-1730

The Lord is my Fisherman.

Excellent, one and all.

Why are you crying, Jennie?

I miss him, Teacher.

Me too, Teacher.

We all do, Craig and Jennie in our own way.

He was a wonderful person.

And there are many more stories about him which haven't been told here concerning all the other good things he done, spoke and wrote about in his life.

But just to come back to the school foundation stone for a moment.

After it had been buried the persecution lasted for at least a further eighty to ninety years.

And by this time all those who had been involved in the building of the school had also passed away.

And it seems the story of the buried foundation stone died with them, and didn't come to light again until 1830 when the beautiful snow white Irish wolfhound appeared in the seventy-nine year-old housekeeper's dream.

Incidentally, the housekeeper's mother was one of the students in that first class in the school back in 1730.

Wow!

Her mother must have sent her the lovely Irish wolfhound, Teacher to show her where the foundation stone was hidden.

Yes, most likely, Laura.

Upon discovering the foundation stone the principal suggested that the soil and stones be removed from all around the school walls right down to the level of the foundation stone.

And so that very summer teachers, parents and students came to help remove all the soil and stones.

Even the parish priest and his housekeeper happily lent a helping hand.

Today we have a grand flat area all round the school, and the foundation stone is clearly visible for all to see and read.

When you go outside later have a look up at the wall and you will still be able to make out how high or how deep the soil and stones used to be.

And when your daddies and mummies have a chance, ask them to take you to the old graveyard to visit the grave of Fr. O'Greenane.

It is only about three miles from the school.

While you are there standing by his grave think of

how difficult his life must have been, and be sure to say a prayer of thanks to him in your hearts for having the courage to build our precious school.

We will, Teacher.

Thank you.

Oh, and one other thing.

I would like you to keep in mind that even though for some reason you might follow a different religion later in your life or even none at all, always remember your spiritual and cultural roots, and the mighty brave good people like Fr. Peter O'Greenane who helped fashion for you your mind to think and your heart to believe.

We must always be very thankful to them wherever we go.

We will, Teacher.

Thank you.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

STORY

10

SENSE OF WONDERMENT

Prologue

It is Friday afternoon and Principal, Declan McGrath
and his twenty-nine students:
Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura,
Martin, and Patrick in fourth class;
Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia,
Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas in fifth:
Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen,
Sophie, and Tara in sixth are about to
enter a storytelling session.

~::~~

Teacher, it's almost storytelling time.

Okay.

Quietly move back the desks.

Put your mobile phones on silent
and into your bags.

Come sit here before me on the floor,
and away to story sow, we will go.

Yeah!

Now this story, Students is about a Girl
who was Once Very Happy, but who
now is Really Hurting.

Susannah, who is eleven years of age used to live with her parents in the city of Al-Raqqah in the land of Syria.

She is an only child as her mammy for health reasons wasn't able to have any more children.

Also living in the house with them were her grandparents; her mammy's elderly parents.

Colin?

Yes, Teacher?

Will you go up and point out Al-Raqqah for us there on the wall map, please?

Sure, Teacher.

That is correct.

Thanks, Colin.

You are welcome, Teacher.

The city of Al-Raqqah is located on the northern bank of the mighty Euphrates River and to east as you can see of the city of Aleppo which is itself located north of the city of Homs which in turn is located north of the capital city, Damascus.

Al-Raqqah like many Syrian cities has a very long and rich history.

For instance, from the year 796 AD to the year 809 AD it was the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate under the reign of famous Harun al-Rashid.

For a time it was even called Al-Rashid.

And as we know from our history lessons, a caliphate is an area governed by an Islamic leader: a caliph.

And probably the most famous of these caliphs was the fifth caliph, namely Harun al-Rashid or to give him his full name: Harun al-Rashid ibn Muhammad al-Mahdi ibn al-Mansur al-Abbasi.

He was born in Iran and brought up in the royal palace at Baghdad.

Other than from our history lessons, how else do we know of him?

Anyone?

Teacher?

Yes, Natasha?

There are stories about him, Teacher in *The Arabian Nights*.

There are in indeed, Natasha or as it is also called *The Book of One Thousand and One Nights*.

And it is interesting to know that originally the title, *A Thousand and One* merely meant a large number of stories and didn't actually mean a thousand stories.

It would be like we saying, tons of stories.

I like Shabrazad very much, Teacher as she is very bright and a great storyteller.

She surely is, Tara.

Now, Susannah and her family lived in a very nice neighbourhood where all the families there had known each other for decades.

Their children had always happily played with each other and had grown up with great respect and love for each other.

Nearly all of the families in the neighbourhood were Muslim.

There were three Jewish families, and Susannah's family was the only Christian; the only Catholic family there.

Everyone enjoyed helping each other and looking out for each other's children when they were out playing.

They would consider every child to be their own and in that way everybody always felt very comfortable.

When Susannah's family celebrated, for instance, Christmas, the Muslim and Jewish families would always wish them a Very Happy Christmas.

And when the Muslim families were celebrating their religious events, Susannah's family and the three Jewish families would always wish them Blessings of Joy.

And so too would Susannah's family and the Muslim families wish the Jewish families Goodness in Abundance.

In this way did they all live together in respect, gratitude and harmony.

Susannah attended a Catholic school in another part of the city as there was no Catholic school anywhere nearby.

She used to have to travel there by public bus.

It would take her about thirty-five to forty-five minutes to get there.

She loved the bus ride to and from school.

Along the way she greatly enjoyed looking out the window at all that could be seen.

And there were so many interesting things to be seen.

The morning air always smelt lovely and fresh.

She would wave and say hello to a bird that happened to be flying along by the bus, and in particular she liked seeing doves sunning themselves on a roof, and she would wave over to them too.

And whenever she would see a setting moon she would always throw kisses to it.

Throwing kisses to the sun was the first thing she did every morning after opening back the curtains in her bedroom.

She especially loved when the bus slowed down to pass through the main open air market; the Museum Market as it is called for it is located next to the city's main museum.

Whenever she sees the museum she thinks of the great family outing she and her family had in it.

She enjoyed looking at all the interesting artefacts excavated from around the city and the province.

She was very interested in those dating from the time of Caliph Harun al-Rashid, and from the Byzantine and Roman eras.

She was filled with a sense of wonderment looking at each one of them, and she could get the feeling of how important it is to safely preserve and keep a country's heritage for future children and adults to see and enjoy.

Teacher, last summer when our relatives were home on holidays we took them to visit the National Museum of Ireland.

It was a wonderful experience.

I was especially interested in the archaeological collection.

The Ardagh Chalice and the Tara Brooch are really beautiful.

The National Museum is an awesome and inspiring place to visit, truly.

Thank you, Anthony.

You are welcome, Teacher.

Susannah would be smiling and waving out an open bus window to whosoever happened to be looking her way at that very moment.

And they would always smile and wave back to her.

She loved taking in all the different fragrances of fresh fruit, vegetables and spices as the bus lingered along through the market.

Wafting away in the air were spices such as cinnamon, coriander and nutmeg.

She loved the fragrances of freshly baked breads all spread out on long makeshift tables.

She imagined all such fragrances to be like birds and butterflies playing about in the air.

Teacher, I like the smell of cinnamon very much.

My mammy always asks me to shake some of it on her freshly baked apple tarts.

Wonderful.

Learn well from you mammy, Ciara on how to bake delicious apple tarts and breads of all kinds.

I will, Teacher.

Thank you.

And all of you remember well that your mammy and daddy are always your first teachers.

We will, Teacher.

Thank you.

The sellers and the buyers in the market always seemed to be very happy and carefree in themselves.

And she loved the smiles of the people who were enjoying coffee sitting at small tables in front of the cafes.

There was one man in particular who used always be

sitting on his own and he seemed to be always writing something as he sipped his coffee.

She imagined him to be a poet.

And he would always wave and smile to her and she to him.

School for her was a magical place for there were so many wonderful things that needed to be learnt and thought about, and she wanted to be thinking and knowing about them all.

Like her classmates she loved playing and chatting in the school playground.

And while they all loved their classrooms very much they loved all the more the playground as it was ever so pretty.

It had ancient trees growing in it such as olives, figs and oaks, and not so ancient ones such as myrtle, orange and lemon.

There were many flowers growing in and out among the trees and about two shimmering fountains.

The playground even had a fishpond which had many colourful fish in it.

And there were many birds; many different birds who used visit the playground all year round, and would at times be splashing and fluttering about in the fountains.

She used speak of the playground as being a garden; a garden playground.

Sometimes she would compose short poems in it.

There was only one other place in Al-Raqqah that was of a similar loveliness to the school playground, and that was Na'eemin Square in the center of the city.

The name means 'a heavenly place'.

Here young and old people enjoyed playing and

relaxing.

It was also a place where boys and girls used meet to have some delicious ice cream while chatting and joking away in the company of many others doing just the same.

And like all the other girls in her class Susannah had one boy or two boys that she really liked.

These boys would be in her class as her school was a mixed school for girls and boys.

Sometimes she and her friends would maybe like one boy for a day or even a few days before they would then start liking him less and start liking another boy more.

It was the same for the boys in that they would maybe like one girl for a day or even a few days before they would then start liking her less and start liking another girl more.

And often it was the case where they would have liked all the boys only to return to liking again the first boy they had started out liking.

It was the same with the boys in that they would have liked all the girls only to return to liking again the first girl they had started out liking.

This swirling of liking and ever returning to liking would happen many times.

Susannah was like that too, but then one morning on the way to school she noticed a boy about her own age on the bus who looked vey nice and had a lovely smile.

The only problem was that he attended a different school several stops beyond her stop.

She had never spoken to him but whenever they would catch each other's eyes on the bus they would always shyly smile to each other.

Then one morning when she got on the bus she noticed that he was sitting on his own.

In a moment she thought she would like to go sit next to him, that is if he wouldn't mind, but she was way too polite to just go and sit down next to him.

She was about to pass on down the aisle when the boy indicated with his hand, like this, and invited her to sit next to him.

She happily accepted his invitation, and thanked him.

And it was as if they had always known each other for they chatted all the way to her school bus stop.

It felt very nice to be talking to him.

She liked the sound of his voice.

They found out from each other that they were both the same age and were interested in many of the same things.

She told him that she was a Christian and he her that he was a Muslim.

The boy's name was Rahim.

She liked the sound of it; it was a warm sound.

Rahim would only be on the morning bus.

In the afternoons he was either on an earlier one or a later one.

Now three weeks after she meeting Rahim, Susannah and her classmates were out playing in the school playground; the garden playground, when suddenly, they heard three military jets screeching past overhead.

They were going so fast that they were not even able to catch a glimpse of them.

All the children got such a big fright that they ran

screaming in every direction.

And birds were crashing into each other in the air trying to quickly escape from those terrible sounds.

When the screeching of the jets had faded away into the distance the children again came out into the playground and continued to play away as if nothing had happened.

The teachers didn't say anything to the children other than that the jets must have been out practicing.

But, Susannah being very bright, asked the teachers why they had to be practicing over their school, and why so low too, and why so fast too, but the teachers had no convincing answers to offer her.

Two mornings later didn't the same thing happen: three fighter aircraft screeched low in over the school, but this time they flew even lower than at the previous time.

The vibration was so severe that it shattered all the windows in the school and made the fishpond and the fountains shudder, and all the tall trees to bend.

And while no one was hurt in anyway everyone was absolutely terrified.

Even the teachers were terrified, and some of them were in shock.

The school would have to be closed until new windows were put in, but nobody knew how long that was going to take.

Susannah greatly missed attending school; greatly missed going to school; greatly missed sitting next to Rahim on the bus and chatting away with him about so many interesting things.

He would always let her sit next to the window for he knew how very much she loved seeing so many things

along the way and to be waving to people.

She loved that he was so sensitive and kind.

And she missed above all playing with her friends in the pretty garden playground.

The days went by and by and the nights felt long, yet there was no word of the school reopening.

And every day there were military jets and helicopters screeching and chopping about in the sky over the city.

They were now even doing so in the middle of the night.

Then one day there were no more screeching military jets and chopping helicopters to be seen or heard.

There was an eerie silence in the city.

Nobody quite knew what was going to happen next.

Was this the end of something or was it just a lull or was there something worse going to happen?

Nobody knew for sure, but as it turned out it was a case of the something worse happening; a whole lot worse happening.

What happened, Teacher?

One morning, Patrick a long convoy of small pickup trucks; jeeps, entered right into the heart of the city.

There were young men dressed in black clothes piled into the backs of them, and they had guns and black flags which had something written on them in white.

There were no women among them.

And they were shouting and laughing and carelessly shooting their guns into the air.

A number of the pickups were carrying several tins of black paint and many paint brushes and spray guns.

The brushes looked more like small brooms.

They suddenly came to a halt and men jumped out and started painting everything in the area black.

They even sprayed the flowers and trees black and any an ant, spider, mouse, rat, cat or dog that happened to be in their path.

If they could they would also have sprayed black every honeybee, bumblebee, moth, butterfly, and all the birds of the air.

They were something else, Teacher, weren't they?

They were indeed, Sean.

Who knows, Teacher, but given that awful carry on maybe they would have also liked to paint the snowy white clouds, the blue sky, the golden sun, the beige moon and even the silvery stars black.

How would they able to do that, Sean?

I don't know the how, Mary but I can see such a scene in my mind.

Then others also jumped out of the pickups and they were brandishing hammers and swinging sledges, and they immediately set to work smashing any and all statues and monuments around about.

On a clock tower there was a famous statue of a man and a woman standing next to each other bravely holding a torch on high, like this, and looking with confidence and hope into the sky.

They also set their hammers on it but were only able to partially damage it.

They smashed a cross outside the Greek/Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation, and they broke the bells and the crosses in another church, and burnt all its books before they raised their own black flag on top of the rubble.

Some of these men stood on top of the roofs or on

the bonnets of the pickups and started shouting out a new law; a law that all women and young girls were to immediately return to their homes, and that from the next day onwards they would only be able to come outside the door if they were wearing black from head to toe; even on out to the very tips of their fingernails.

They were to completely cover their faces; not even their eyelashes were to be seen.

And this law was meant for all girls; all women from the ages of four up to a hundred.

Any woman or any girl of whatever age that was caught not wearing black from head to toe and on out to the tips of their fingernails would, they shouted, not be around to see the next day's sunrise.

A shiver of cold fear and helplessness ran right through the citizens of Al-Raqqah at such a word; such a law.

They shouted out several other new laws too which if weren't obeyed would have grave consequences for not alone the person caught but also for their families.

They also said that they would be introducing slavery and that from the following week they would be conducting a slave market in the Museum Market in which young girls and women would be bought and sold.

The week after that they would be buying and selling young boys and men.

The entire city was about to be completely taken over by this group of extremely narrow-minded cruel people.

They were so narrow-minded and cruel that it would be almost impossible for anyone else to be even more narrow-minded and crueler than them.

Now, as you know, I don't like talking about the bad things bad people do in the world because in some ways I believe it is a form of free advertising for them, but I need to say something about how this group affected the peace and happiness of Susannah and her family; affected the peace and happiness of the people of Al-Raqqah; the peace and happiness of the people of Syria, even the peace and happiness of the entire world.

Teacher, my daddy was once out in our garden talking on his mobile to someone, and I was playing with our puppy, and even though I wasn't listening to his conversation, because I never do, but I somehow heard him say something like that, Jesus was being crucified all the time nowadays in faraway places.

And I think he mentioned Syria or some place that sounded like Syria.

I am not sure.

I thought it a strange word though because Jesus was only crucified one time, wasn't he, Teacher?

Yes he was, Gerard but that I think might have been your daddy's way of describing the unbelievably horrific things that are happening these days in Syria.

It is not easy to talk about them, and I don't think I can.

That morning; the same morning that the convoy of small pickup trucks with the men dressed in black clothes piled into the backs of them and shouting and laughing and carelessly shooting their guns into the air had entered the city, Susannah's mammy was on her way to her place of work; she was on her way to Al-Raqqah National Hospital for she was a doctor.

When she saw them, she immediately pulled her car over to the curb; got out, and quickly hid in a doorway,

and observed and listened as they started painting everything black, and breaking statues and monuments, and telling the women and girls that they would have to dress in all black, and that they were going to be buying and selling them in a slave market the following week.

And as she was observing them and listening to them something inside her told her that she must get her family out of the city as quickly as possible.

Without waiting around to see what was going to happen next or to listen for what was going to be said, she quickly made her way back home on foot through the back streets.

She was so scared for nearly in every second street she took some of these men would be there either shouting and shooting their guns or painting or spraying something black or smashing or breaking a statue or a monument.

It was about two in the afternoon by the time she got in the door of her house.

She had been walking and half running home for almost five hours.

Fortunately, her husband and Susannah and her parents were all there but they were becoming very frightened and anxious.

And without wasting a minute she said to them that the family would have to get out of the city that very night before some really bad things started to happen.

There was one major problem however, and that was that her elderly parents weren't in the best of health, and as such would not be well enough to be able to travel right away.

And besides, both of them said to Susannah's

mammy that even if they were well and able enough to travel they wouldn't because they said they wouldn't leave anyone force them out of their homes; anyone force them to abandon their beloved Syria which has been the home of their ancestors for hundreds and hundreds of years.

Then without as much as a second thought, Susannah's daddy said he would remain behind to take care of them while Susannah's mammy would escape the city with Susannah.

Susannah's mammy didn't want to leave her parents and husband behind but her husband convinced her it was the best of all possible ways to deal with the awful happening that had come upon their city.

And Susannah's mammy remembered the new law whereby young girls and women would be bought and sold as slaves in the market from the following week.

It was heartbreaking for Susannah and her mammy to have to say goodbye.

As soon as the sun went down they set out, and all through the night they walked in out of ever frightening shadows, sounds and smells.

And with the coming of the dawn they happened upon a small wooden fishing boat; a boat of no more than ten to twelve feet in length and it pulled up on a bank of the mighty Euphrates River.

Susannah's mammy took it to be a God sent, yet she was a bit sorry to whoever owned it to have to be taking it, but this was a life and death situation.

Susannah helped her mammy push the boat out a little and then they got into it.

It had a long pole in it so Susannah's mammy took it in her hands and with standing up in the stern of the

boat; in the back of the boat, she pushed the pole into the water; into the mud, and the boat went forward.

It was a little hard for her at first until she got used to it, and besides they were moving against the current.

As you know the Euphrates originates in eastern Turkey, as you can see there on the map, and flows through Syria and Iraq to join up with the Tigris River as they make their way into the Persian Gulf.

That whole area used at one time be called Mesopotamia which means ‘the land between two rivers’.

Susannah’s mammy kept the boat close to the bank; close to the reeds to avoid being easily seen by anyone.

And as they were moving along they heard a sound like that of a low la low la cry.

And they were wondering what it might be when just then a handsome foxy backed white bellied tomcat crawled out from underneath a canvas in the bow of the boat, and he went and climbed up on Susannah’s lap, and there he wished to be rubbed and given loads and loads of attention.

And Susannah was delighted to see such a happy and pretty cat.

Susannah’s mammy smiled down upon the lovely scene and thanked God for such a timely and nice gift.

Perhaps he too she thought was escaping the city.

And she poled the boat on and on until Al-Raqqah was no longer visible in the distance.

And when she found a nice convenient spot along the bank she eased the boat up.

The cat was the first to jump out.

He quickly ran into the nearby tall wavy grass.

Susannah called to him to come back but he

wouldn't; he just kept on walking.

Tears welled up in her eyes at the sight of him and his lovely bushy tail disappearing off into the grass.

Her mammy told her it was for the best because he might meow about something at the wrong time and that could let the bad people know where they were hiding.

Her mammy was very wise, Teacher, wasn't she?

She was indeed, Laura.

After an hour or two they were able to get on a bus bound for the city of Aleppo.

It wasn't a regular bus but rather a privately operated one, and the cost of getting on it was three times that of the normal price.

It was seriously overcrowded.

There were people sitting on the floor in the aisle as well as out on the roof, yet Susannah and her mammy didn't mind at all such a temporary minor discomfort.

The main thing was that they were getting as far away as possible from that group of bad people.

Teacher, did that group of bad people call themselves anything?

Owen, they call themselves: ISELL.

What do they sell, Teacher?

Their own original goodness, Sophie.

To who, Teacher?

To who; that is a good question, David.

For now, let us just say, for want of a better expression, to the King of Badness.

And what does he give them in exchange for their goodness, Teacher?

For every ounce of goodness, Finbarr they give him he gives them a hundred tons of badness in return.

Now, let nobody ask me about the bad things they do.

Okay?

We won't, Teacher, but you know what they do, don't you?

I know about some of the things they do, Jennie, and that is even a bit too much for me to know.

Teacher; Teacher why are there tears in your eyes?

Oh, well, oh, well that is just, ah, Heather the sunlight in them.

Now it took the bus nine hours to reach the outskirts of Aleppo.

Susannah and her mammy were exhausted, hungry and very very tired.

Teacher, my mammy said that I was so very very tired one time when I was small that I fell asleep sitting on the toilet.

But it never again happened sense I am big.

That is surely a good thing to know, Brian.

Yes, Brian that is surely a good thing to know all right.

Honestly, sometimes you say the dafdest of things, like remember when you said a horse's head and tail looks like they could have been put on back to front?

How would you know anyway, Amy whether they were or they weren't?

Someone on the bus had told them to try and get to a certain house not far from where the bus would stop, and that they would be able to get some help there for a good family lived in that house.

Eventually they found the house, and sure enough the family living there were the very best of people.

They gave them water to bathe themselves; food to fill there stomachs, and beds to comfortably sleep in.

They stayed with that family for three days before

they set off south for the city of Homs.

The eldest son in that family, out of the goodness of his heart, drove them all the way there in his car even though they had one puncture and the engine twice overheated.

They stayed in Homs for two nights with someone the man knew before they set off westwards for the coast; for the Lebanese city of Tripoli.

You can see it there on the map.

Teacher, did the eldest son of the good family also drive them to the coast?

No, he didn't, Niamh for he had to return home to Aleppo to take care of his own family.

Parts of the way there they were able to get rides in cars and in the backs of trucks and even in donkey carts, but most of the time they were on foot.

And of an afternoon as they were walking along this very dusty road towards a town called Al-Husn, they could see a huge castle in the near distance.

Susannah's mammy told her it was the famous fortress of Crac des Chevaliers.

We came across it, didn't we, if you remember, in our history of the Holy Land and the Knights Templar?

Yes, we did, Teacher.

And you told us that it is has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site.

It has indeed, Hugh.

To keep Susannah happy, and for her not to be thinking too much of the hardships of the journey, her mammy told her some great stories about the knights and the fortress.

In particular, she enjoyed a story about an artist who

had painted frescoes in its chapel.

She loved listening to her mammy tell stories for she had a way of telling them that gave you the feeling you yourself were really in them.

Her mammy's storytelling style would oft remind her of the flight patterns of doves and their pauses on rooftops.

Eventually, and after much difficulty they reached the coastal city of Tripoli.

It felt good to be there as Susannah's grandparents lived there; that is, her daddy's parents.

Were they Lebanese or Syrian, Teacher?

Susannah's daddy, Emily is Lebanese, and her mammy Syrian.

After a few days rest Susannah's mammy announced that she was going to return to Syria; going to return to Al-Raqqah to be a strength to her beloved husband, and that together they would take care of each other and her beloved parents.

And because she is a doctor she would also be able to take care of people in the hospital.

And another reason why she wanted to return was because her family is one of the only few remaining Christian families left in Al-Raqqah.

When the ISELL group will be no more, and peace will have returned to the city and to the country, she will have her beloved Susannah sent back to them.

Susannah cried and cried and didn't want to leave her mammy return as she knew the journey would be very difficult and dangerous for her.

But, Susannah's mammy had made up her mind, and so with eyes brimming over with many tears she left

her precious daughter in Tripoli, and bravely on her own headed back the very same route that she and Susannah had taken: along by the town of Al-Husn and the fortress of Crac des Chevaliers, and along by Homs, and Aleppo and finally into Al-Raqqah.

Teacher, she never thought of herself, did she?

Women and children and the elderly, Natalia are the real heroines and heroes in war.

One month later there was a bomb explosion in Tripoli and Susannah's grandparents feared that the Syrian war was beginning to spill over into Lebanon, and so they decided it would be best if they sent her abroad.

First they arranged for her to go and stay with some relatives in Beirut.

One of her cousins would accompany her abroad.

At Rafic Hariri International Airport in Beirut, Susannah was very sad to be leaving the Lebanese side of her family who had been so kind to her; very sad to be leaving all the wonderful people who had helped she and her mammy to escape from Al-Raqqah.

But more than all this she was heartbroken to be having to leave her mammy and daddy and grandparents behind in Al-Raqqah for she had not heard from them in the meantime.

As such, she didn't know if her mammy had safely made it back home or not.

And so it was with a very heavy heart that she boarded the airplane for England.

On the Middle East Airlines flight to London Heathrow her mind was full of memories of home.

It was her first time on an airplane; the first time she had seen the land and the mountains and the sea from a

great height.

To her eyes they looked mysteriously beautiful in the hazy morning sunshine.

After a three hour stopover in London her cousin put her on board an Aer Lingus airplane for Ireland.

The cousin would later in the evening take a flight back to Beirut.

It was the first time she was on her own, but the airhostesses were very nice to her and made sure there was someone coming to meet her at Dublin Airport.

It was wet and overcast when the plane landed in Dublin Airport; not a blue opening in the clouds to be seen in any direction save for one tiny one away off in the southeast.

She would be staying with an Irish family who were very good friends of her mammy's.

The father in the family had studied medicine together with Susannah's mammy in the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin when they were training to be doctors.

At present, even as I tell the story, Susannah is attending a primary school here in Ireland.

In the beginning she had great difficulty because she couldn't speak hardly any English and everything seemed so very different to her.

More than anything she was greatly missing her family, her neighbours, her classmates, her school with its garden playground, and especially she was greatly missing sitting next to Rahim on the bus; missing chatting away to him while at the same time taking in the familiar sights and sounds along the way, and to be waving to the people in the marketplace.

She was missing seeing the poet writing and sipping his coffee; she was missing his grand wave and lovely smile.

Every night her mammy's friend tries to ring her family in Al-Raqqah for her, but as of yet, they have had no news whatsoever; no word on whether they are safe or not.

The bad people are still in control of the city and daily are doing horrendous things.

Every night she cries and prays; prays and cries herself to sleep.

And even when she wakes in the morning her pillow is damp for she has been sobbing away in her dreams.

Oh; oh, oh, that is so sad, Teacher.

It is truly, Aoife.

She longs for the day when peace will come to her beautiful city of Al-Raqqah and to her beloved homeland of Syria, and that she will be able to return again to her family, her classmates and to Rahim; feeling again the warmth in his voice and the loveliness of his smile shining upon her.

Oh, we hope, Teacher; oh, we hope there will be peace soon and that she can return to her lovely life.

Let us hope so, and pray so, Ciaran.

Now however lovely Ireland is, and truly lovely it is no doubt, and however nice her Irish classmates and teachers are to her, and truly nice they are no doubt, and however understanding the beautiful family she is staying with is, and truly understanding it is no doubt, she though full of gratitude for all of these still desperately longs to return to her homeland.

She would love to be again sitting in the bus next to

Rahim as it slows down to pass through the Museum open air market.

She would love to be again smiling and waving out the open window to whosoever happened to be looking her way at that very moment.

And they would all smile and wave back to her.

She would love to be again taking in all the different fragrances of fresh fruit, vegetables and spices as the bus lingered along through the market.

Wafting away in the air would be all the familiar spices such as cinnamon, coriander and nutmeg.

She would love again to be smelling the fragrances of freshly baked breads all spread out on long makeshift tables.

And she would again love to be imagining all such fragrances to be like birds and butterflies happily playing about in the air.

She would love again for things to be the way they used to be.

And that, Students is today's story.

Thank you; thank you Teacher.

That was a great story.

We will be thinking about it and looking forward to next week's one.

Me too; me too.

Safe home now, and give my hello to your parents.

Oh, and switch back on the volume on your mobile phones before you leave the school grounds.

We will, Teacher. Bye.

Goodbye.

Author

Richard Mc Sweeney: Risteárd Mac Suibhne, Richard of Éire, Richard of Ireland is a self-designated Irish philosopher of the natural kind; a self-originator who enjoys expressing his ideas in a personal prose-poetic style. He is happily married and lives on the beautiful isle of Éire.

The closing two decades of the last century saw him teaching English Language and Literature, and studying philosophy in the Far East and the Middle East respectively.

He has a Masters in Chinese Taoist Philosophy from Seoul National University which he gained through the mediums of Korean and Classical Chinese. He has a BA in Korean Language & Literature from Kyunggi University in Seoul, and a Diploma in Philosophy & Arts from Saint Patrick's College in Maynooth, County Kildare in Ireland.

He has been constantly practicing the art of expressing himself in written form ever since returning to Ireland in 2001 - always believing his best originality is yet to come.

In 2002-2004 he done substitution work in Glanworth National School, Glanworth, County Cork - classes 4, 5 & 6. Glanworth is his mother's native village. This very happy memorable experience along with stories told to him by his mother, Joan Healy-Mc Sweeney (1936-) from her childhood would some twelve years later be the inspiration for his own stories for children as contained in this present book.

From 2011 he put himself forth as a possible independent candidate for 9th President of Ireland.

In 2016 he played the part of William Butler Yeats in a local drama.

Bibliography

Including *As Children Of Ireland* he has published twelve books:

Abiding in Bobbio ISBN 9781329382237 Hardcover, 350 Pages

Bradawn Yeats ISBN 9781304816436 Hardcover, 87 Pages

Visitant Eve ISBN 9781304904423 Hardcover, 211 Pages

A Green Desert Father (ISBN n/a) Hardcover, 794 Pages

Bridging Al-Serenities ISBN 9781445299747 Paperback, 534 Pages

Unto Lineage Royal ISBN 9781409276388 Hardcover, 504 Pages

Innkeeper's Fire, Vol. 2 ISBN 9781847995520 Hardcover, 605 Pages

Innkeeper's Fire, Vol. 1 ISBN 9781847995513 Hardcover, 493 Pages

Hearing in the Write ISBN 9781847992932 Hardcover, 499 Pages

Generations Reaching ISBN 9781847991102 Hardcover, 503 Pages

A Jesus of Nazareth ISBN 9781847990303 Hardcover, 316 Pages

Myriam of Lebanon ISBN 9781847536730 Hardcover, 111 Pages

To learn more about Richard and his work visit:

<http://www.rivers2c.com>

Back cover caption

From Ireland: a mystical and beautiful isle of the north eastern Atlantic Ocean renowned for its mighty storytellers comes a collection of ten original long stories for children aged 8-12 their parents, grandparents, and their teachers. These are imaginary stories told by an imaginary schoolteacher to imaginary students in an imaginary Irish countryside primary school.

Principal, Declan McGrath is highly respected by parents and greatly loved by his students not alone for the way he admirably teaches them but also for the marvellous lively-paced contemporary narratives he shares with them. In his voice is found a lovely natural rhythm and rhyme that is pure music to the ears of his students.

He has twenty-nine students in his classroom. In 4th class there is Amy, Brian, Ciara, Cormac, Craig, Heather, Laura, Martin, and Patrick; in 5th Anthony, Aoife, Ciaran, David, Gerard, Jennie, Julia, Mary, Natalia, Niamh, Sean, and Thomas, and in 6th Colin, Emily, Finbarr, Hugh, Natasha, Owen, Sophie, and Tara.

He uses storytelling very effectively to refine his awareness of the wellbeing of his students. Occasionally, they will say out things during a storytelling session that they would not say otherwise.

Although the stories have a local Irish setting or bearing they are not parochial; far from it for they aspire to and deal with universal themes and concerns in a way that a reader in any part of the world will be able to relate to and enjoy.

The world is ripe for the fresh voice and personal style found in these richly multi-layered story lines; stories which parents and teachers alike will find most appealing and indeed quite useful for their own storytelling times.

The front cover image within the Irish nature scene is that of a full-scale model of the James Webb Space Telescope which is expected to be launched in October of 2018.

Richard Mc Sweeney of Ireland is a conscientious gatekeeper of his own creativity. This is the twelfth book he has allowed to go dwell in the greater worlds of the present and the future.

